Yoga as embodied peacebuilding: Moving through personal, interpersonal and collective trauma(s) in post-conflict Colombia

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies
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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine creative methods of peacebuilding that are both community-driven and embodied in their approach. I evaluate how these methods can simultaneously challenge the confines of conventional peacebuilding mechanisms in transitional and post-conflict contexts, while also offering a unique complement to existing programs and structures. I look at the multifaceted socio-cultural expressions of yoga globally, inquiring as to how this mind-body practice can offer opportunities in peacebuilding on both individual and collective levels.

My project is rooted in the principles of community-engaged research and feminist research ethics. More specifically, this dissertation closely engages with the work of the Colombian non-profit organization, Corporación Dunna. Dunna works to address deeply rooted cyclical and intergenerational violence embedded in Colombian society through building capacity for coexistence and trust within communities. As such, their programming focuses on individual mental wellbeing as well as on addressing the manifestations of trauma in families, communities, and whole nations.

The data collection process followed a snowball and community-driven approach to data collection. This process took place during a three-month research fellowship based in Bogotá and included semi-structured brief and in-depth interviews, with 73 participants across Colombia. Interviewees included Dunna’s staff and program participants, citizens-at-large, and various members of the non-profit and peacebuilding sector in Colombia. The research period took place in the months following the signing of the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); my findings are situated within this context and fragment in history.

My analysis of these interviews is informed by postcolonial feminist theories, transrational peace philosophy and the principles of elicitive peace work. My findings aim to expand on existing research within the field of peacebuilding and build the case for a deeper understanding of embodied approaches to peacebuilding in post-conflict and transitional contexts. Moreover, I argue for the need for a holistic approach to peace work that
necessarily integrates the various layers of societal conflict including national, community, interpersonal, and individual aspects of human life.

**Summary for Lay Audience**

In this dissertation, I examine creative methods of peacebuilding (such as art and dance) and evaluate how these methods can both challenge and complement on-the-ground peacebuilding (such as peace accords or truth commissions) in societies transitioning from war and conflict. Specifically, I look at yoga and explore how this method can offer opportunities in peacebuilding by addressing individual and collective wellbeing in Colombia. My research took place in the months following the signing of the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); my findings are situated within this context and fragment in history.

My research is community-based—I partner with the Colombian non-profit organization, Corporación Dunna—and follows the principles of feminist research. Dunna works to address deeply rooted and intergenerational violence. Their projects focus on building community, trust, and well-being through yoga. My research involved a 3-month fellowship in Colombia where I conducted conversational interviews which covered a wide range of topics related to yoga and peace with 73 participants. Interviewees included Dunna’s staff and program participants, citizens-at-large, and various members of the non-profit and peacebuilding sector in Colombia.

**Keywords**

Colombia, Peacebuilding, Peace process, Feminist methodology, Armed conflict, Yoga studies, Elicitive peacebuilding, Transrational peace philosophy, Arts-based peacebuilding, Transitional justice, Grassroots peacebuilding, Community-driven research, Trauma studies
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

In all corners of the globe, yoga is used as a mechanism of peacebuilding—for healing from trauma and as a platform for building community and trust, in addition to the more commonly discussed individualized benefits of the practice to the body and mind. In England, Germany, and the United States, among others, yoga initiatives have been facilitated with refugees dealing with trauma and displacement (Ourmala 2016; Boele 2016). In countries such as Syria, Palestine, Jordan, South Sudan, Jamaica, Afghanistan and Colombia, yoga is presently used as a tool to cope with and address deeply rooted conflicts, structural inequalities, socio-political tensions, patterns of violence and the individual manifestations including PTSD (Hatuqua 2012; Hajjar 2016; Cue 2013; Dunna 2020; MacLellan 2016; Africa Yoga Project 2020; Urban Yogis n.d.; Zutshi 2016; Art of Living 2017; Takruri 2015; Qazi 2019). Worldwide, yoga has been practiced on the periphery of what can be deemed ‘formal’ peacebuilding efforts, such as truth commissions, the rebuilding of physical infrastructure, or government sanctioned programs in countries such as Rwanda, Colombia, Myanmar, Palestine and Syria (Catlett and Bunn 2016, Dunna 2020, Feet on the Ground 2019, Senger and Huen 2020, The Safe Space Myanmar 2020). Grassroots and non-profit organizations, yoga studios, as well as individual citizens have galvanized this practice in ways that are creative and enable yoga to be offered at a low-cost to communities and individuals living in conflict zones (including transitional and/or post-conflict realities). Against this global backdrop—with more examples continuing to emerge—this dissertation explores the following central research questions in relation to the role of yoga in peacebuilding:

- How does yoga complement, contradict, or challenge existing rehabilitative and reconciliation-focused peacebuilding efforts following a peace process and more generally within conflict/post-conflict settings?
- How is yoga different from, or complementary to, other ‘alternative’ and ‘creative’ methods of peacebuilding and rehabilitation in conflict/post-conflict such as art therapy, dance, creative writing, theatre, or sport?

- How does yoga work on an individual level? What are the reported benefits of yoga on indicators of individual well-being, such as emotional regulation and processing complex trauma?

- What tools does yoga offer in dealing with interpersonal and relational conflicts? What does yoga offer in navigating everyday conflicts with family, neighbours, and others?

- How does yoga impact the collective or community levels in our societies? Can yoga be utilized in repairing social fabrics and rebuilding trust where it has been broken? For example, can yoga facilitate coexistence and empathy between community members with polarized views?

- Lastly, can yoga on these various levels discussed above have rippling effects on broader peacebuilding efforts? If so, how does yoga inform peacebuilding theories and the trajectory of peace studies?

This introductory chapter aims to situate and provide an overview of the project and its rationale, while briefly introducing key research questions (discussed more fully in Chapter 4), theoretical underpinnings (see Chapter 2 for more), and laying a foundation for chapters to come that explore yoga as a bottom-up, community-driven, embodied practice of peacebuilding (see Chapter 3-6).

This dissertation considers yoga as a mechanism at the grassroots level to build peace individually and collectively where state-led initiatives lack or have failed. More specifically, this work delves into the peacebuilding landscape surrounding the recent peace process (2012 to present) between the Colombian government and armed group, the Fuerzas Amargas Revolucionarias de Colombia or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of
Colombia (FARC), who were engaged in conflict for more than fifty years (see Chapter 5 for a more comprehensive historical overview). Importantly, this project partners with the non-profit organization, Corporación Dunna in Colombia, which works across Colombia to facilitate creative methods of peacebuilding including yoga, dance, and writing. Dunna’s work aims to offer coping strategies and tools to develop life skills and break cycles of violence (Dunna 2020). Through creative methods of peacebuilding, Dunna leads communities and groups of individuals highly affected by the armed conflict through various processes that facilitate experiences of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence (Dunna 2020). The organization’s mission is to “contribute to the construction of a sustainable peace in Colombia through the evaluation and implementation of mind-body strategies aimed at the promotion of mental health, emotional recovery and coexistence of the populations most affected by different types of violence” (Dunna 2020). Where institutionalized, free, or accessible reconciliation or rehabilitation programming lacks or lags, Dunna’s staff have sought to provide personal healing and community rebuilding. The later chapters of this work explore who Dunna is, what they do, and how their work might change how we conceptualize peacebuilding in post-conflict realities globally in more detail (Chapters 4-6).

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews and an extensive review of the literature regarding the use of yoga as a peacebuilding tool, this dissertation adds to existing qualitative peace studies literature on alternative, mind-body focused, and grassroots peacebuilding efforts. My work draws from the theoretical framework of transrational peace philosophy (further unpacked and defined in detail in Chapter 2), which values multiplicity and complexity, allowing different worldviews and understandings of peace(s) to co-exist (Echavarría, Ingruber, and Koppensteiner 2018, 2). This understanding of peace allows for imaging alternative realities and approaches to peace in contrast to the “homogenizing, modern, capitalist trends that impose the idea of one worldwide peace as a regulatory ideal” (Echavarria et al. 2018, 2). While acknowledging critical discernment (that must be rooted in social justice and human rights) as imperative within the field of peacebuilding, a transrational understanding of peace advocates for the integration of the aspects of human life that require a more nuanced approach. Transrational peace philosophy, then, calls for the incorporation of a holistic understanding of human beings as
not just thinking subjects, but as beings with “embodied, emotional and spiritual” dimensions (Echavarría et al. 2018, 4).

This is particularly pertinent when understanding conflict, violence, and socio-political and cultural tensions, such in Colombia where 250,000 people were murdered during a multi-decade conflict that left 6.5 million people forcibly displaced from their land and homes (Rueda 2020, Steele 2017, Castro interview 2017). While the Colombian conflict involves multiple actors over several generations, this research specifically examines the relationship between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that was born out of a historical period known as La Violencia (Thomson 2011, 336). Founded in 1964, and ultimately putting down arms in 2016, the FARC was in large part created in response to longstanding inequality and structural violence in Colombia (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). At its height, the organization included 18,000 individuals and financed itself through involvement in illegal gold mining, the drug trade and the organized kidnappings of political figures and elites for ransom and extortion (Henshaw 2020, 6; Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020).

In considering the Colombian peace process with the FARC that commenced in 2012 (as distinct from the other rebel groups that had also been involved in armed conflict in Colombia), multiple layers exist and several factors interrelate, while others exist in contention (expanded on in Chapter 5). While the laying down of arms was monumental following the 2016 referendum process, diverse understandings, opinions, and lived experiences of those directly and indirectly impacted coexist against this backdrop. Many of the interviews conducted across Colombia, as part of this dissertation, speak to this complexity and demonstrate the need to understand the various and complex layers of conflict that manifest on individual, interpersonal and communal levels.

In many respects, this historical moment in Colombia is a symbol of peace, yet many of the factors that led the FARC to take up arms in the first place persist: colonial and imperial imprints are still pertinent within Colombia and daily inequalities related to race, gender, and class remain deeply entrenched, actively imposing barriers to peace (see more in Chapter 5). Those affected by the conflict in Colombia may carry deeply rooted and
complex trauma(s) with them in their daily lives, making the signing of the peace agreement complex. There are presently 8 million registered victims of the broader Colombian conflict, all of whom have been directly affected, including having family members who were murdered or kidnapped (Tapia Navarro 2019). In some cases, individuals have been left with physical but, also, mental and emotional scars of the five-decade-long war—or deal with intersecting structural barriers in everyday life. Moreover, patterns of violence persist and take on other forms, such as the widespread urban crime that is often seen as separate from the largely rural armed conflict involving the FARC but is also part of the cycles of conflict in Colombia. And yet, as ‘normal life’ resumes and public spaces return to communities in post-conflict, oftentimes a lack of trust and deeply entrenched polarization keep individuals in disconnection from one another. Additionally, in some communities, the FARC’s commitment to peace has created a power vacuum for other armed groups to take control, leading to continued or worsening insecurity and violence. These examples aim to briefly demonstrate the complexity of the peace agreement and the varied interpretations and experiences of peace that interviewees have discussed throughout this project. As such, these examples are snapshots of the intricacies that this dissertation seeks to address while allowing for multiple experiences and narratives of peace to exist (Chapters 5 and 6).

Against this backdrop, the discipline of transrational peace research brings a critical underpinning to this project: individual, interpersonal, communal, and national peace are not separate, but are rather integrated and interdependent. This deeper and more nuanced understanding of peace “arises in homeostatic balance between personal harmony, structural justice, relational security and cultural truth” (Echavarría et al. 2018, 4). This multiplicity can sometimes be forgotten in the post-conflict space in the rush to rebuild government, infrastructure, economies, and judicial structures. The macro-level and big-picture peacebuilding efforts are critical, as is the work on social/communal, interpersonal, and individual levels and, ideally, there will be an integrated approach that works on combining multiple layers and understanding of peacebuilding.

As such, this project unfolds what yoga can offer in addressing the complexities of conflict and considers how it might inform the applied and theoretical projects of peace. This this
work aims to address a gap in the literature that focuses both on the mind-body connection and yoga-specific programming in peacebuilding or post-conflict efforts. Specifically, it looks at the global phenomenon of yoga—a practice most that can be understood as rooted in ancient Indian philosophy and a prescription for living a balanced life. Yet, a common understanding of yoga today, especially in the Global North, is by contrast saturated with fitness goals and capitalist pursuits. Modern yoga is frequently critiqued as having been largely stripped of its original intentions and for its disingenuous and culturally appropriative qualities (see Chapter 3). These polarities in the global consciousness around ‘what is yoga’ hold space for understandings of yoga as peace, as a pathway to or vehicle for peace, and also as an antidote to peace that are incongruent with peaceful values. What, then, can the practice of yoga (given these complexities) offer to a space of conflict; to a long civil war with multiple layers; and varied interpretations of what peace means? To gain a deeper understanding of this, I build on existing research conducted by Dunna that began in the fields of psychiatry and psychology. My work is complementary to this existing research and adds to it a feminist lens, as well as contributes a dialogue surrounding yoga as a tool for peacebuilding. My project in particular anchors to the 2016 peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC and involved interviews within and surrounding Dunna’s yoga programs against this socio-political backdrop.

1.1 Chapter overview

In Chapter 2, I review pre-existing research on global peace studies including critical peace studies and the field of transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction. I explore the landscape of classical, contemporary, and feminist approaches to peacebuilding and conclude with a detailed look at the field of transrational peace philosophy and its applied methodology of elicitive peacebuilding. Through this, I lay a foundation for further discussions of a concrete need for more nuanced and diverse approaches to peacebuilding and post-conflict work. I then expand on the theoretical lens of transnational peace philosophy and engage with the principles of elicitive peacebuilding to better understand the benefits of these alternative, creative, and grassroots contributions to peace. This theoretical lens also provides a foundation for a discussion of what a mind-body focused
practice like yoga contributes to addresses some of the limitations in the peacebuilding sector.

Chapter 3 then presents in more depth the complexities of modern postural yoga practices and how they are applied within peacebuilding efforts on a global scale. The multifaceted socio-cultural expressions of yoga across the globe are shifting and influencing efforts within the peacebuilding programs that are emerging as grassroots, locally led initiatives for peace. In this context, yoga is simultaneously confirming and challenging the status quo in peace focused theory and practice. Yoga in and as peace poses many tensions, while also offering possibilities for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Yoga unfolds several questions as to how the practice can be an exercise for transformation in the lives of individuals and their communities who are engaging in peace work (and, more specifically, post-conflict spaces). I begin this conversation by first introducing a brief history of yoga and then a discussion of how it manifests within contemporary popular culture spaces. In this context, I discuss neoliberal ideals of self-betterment and the complex intersection of consumerism and yoga. Through an investigation of the ways in which yoga can be utilized as a tool in transforming communities and as a counter-hegemonic response, I discuss yoga philosophy’s connection to peace through on-the-ground examples from around the globe and in various settings. For example, I briefly discuss the use of yoga in social justice spaces/activism and the carceral system. Through these discussions, I consider whether yoga has the potential to shift societal ideas of peace work and ponder what this might mean for future peace theory and practice.

With the theoretical foundations and a more nuanced understanding of yoga that considers its multifaceted meanings globally laid out in chapter 3, I discuss in chapter 4 the methodological considerations taken surrounding the partnership with Dunna. I discuss the timeframe and context of my research fellowship and then outline the research questions guiding this project in more detail as well as the research procedures. This research engages a mixed-methods snowball-style approach to interviewing, having begun with an initial list of interviewees co-created by Dunna and me. Interviews were conducted with 73 interviewees over a 3-month period. In conducting the interviews, I had a template prepared, but ultimately many of the interviews were relatively unstructured in that they
allowed for new questions and directions to emerge. Interviews were also conducted with a wide variety of stakeholders including citizens-at-large, participants of various programs led by Dunna, Dunna’s partners, yoga instructors and staff, as well as various others working in the peacebuilding sector in Colombia.

Chapter 4 goes on to explain some of the research logistics including data analysis and the use of Quirkos, data security measures, as well as the ethics procedures and considerations made throughout. I unpack theoretical concerns, ethical questions, and the difficulties of feminist research that seeks to be community focused and collaborative. The research methods of this project are informed by postcolonial and intersectional feminist theories and methodologies and aim to center the lived experiences of participants in a way that is both respectful and responsible. Through employing a self-reflexive feminist approach, I also unravel the many challenges posed while addressing systemic, political, and social power dynamics inherent in a project largely situated around a case study located in the Global South but conducted by a scholar from the Global North. In doing so, I discuss how and why I have come to this work, addressing the challenges of feminist research positionality, privilege, and power. In doing so, I discuss how I came to the intersections of feminist research and peace work and how my own motivations as a researcher and life experiences shape and are shaped by this project. This chapter aims to really ground the project in how it speaks to the multiple layers of a research process, as well as the contradictions and questions that arise, even when careful preparation is a priority.

Chapter 5 offers a brief overview of the context surrounding the research fellowship in Colombia with Dunna. It outlines key historical details surrounding the FARC conflict, the referendum ‘no’ vote, as well as the ratification and demobilization phase of the peace process. The chapter also aims to include the voices from those interviewed, offering an array of perspectives to contextualize the historical timeline of events. Following this, Chapter 5 offers insight into theoretical discussions surrounding creative and arts-based approaches to peacebuilding and introduces an array of creative methods of peacebuilding being engaged across Colombia, including projects involving mindfulness, dance, visual and material art, and creative writing. In detailing these examples, I draw on interviews with several non-profit organizers across Colombia and also from artistic exhibits I visited
during my research fellowship. This chapter provides a foundation for the analysis to come and demonstrates the multifaceted and complex nature of peace work. In this chapter I aim to both ground and situate the case study partnership with Dunna that explores yoga for peacebuilding in its historical, social, and political contexts but also to demonstrate the grassroots Colombian-led movement(s) towards creative and arts-based peacebuilding.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a detailed engagement with the interviews I conducted during the data collection phase of this project, specifically surrounding yoga as a vehicle for building peace. In this chapter, I explore the various themes, concerns, and reflections raised by participants during the semi-structured, open-ended interviews. These interviews took place in various communities across Colombia with a wide variety of stakeholders, between November 1, 2017 and February 1, 2018. This analysis partners with Dunna to carry out a case study on how alternative forms of peacebuilding in conflict/post-conflict settings contribute to efforts for peace through creative, embodied, and grassroots participation. With a focus on yoga as an instrument of peacebuilding, topics such as a culture of violence; gendered norms and masculinities; (mis)conceptions surrounding yoga and religion; as well as yoga as a mental health intervention are explored. Moreover, this chapter includes the ways that Dunna’s trauma-sensitive approach to yoga and the broader Satyananda practice with which they engage differs from other representations of yoga globally and from other methods of post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding. More specifically, the findings of the interviews are broken down into the individual level of peacebuilding—including the psychological, emotional physical and physiological experiences reported by participants and close affiliates of Dunna’s programs. Following this, the role of yoga as a tool for collective peace is examined, specifically the social and communal benefits as well as relational and interpersonal benefits.

The dissertation culminates with Chapter 7, which offers a brief discussion and concluding reflections on limitations surrounding the research procedures, methods, and findings. Chapter 7 speaks to a transrational understanding of what peace is and how this looks in praxis. Dunna’s work demonstrates how peacebuilding can be creatively facilitated on individual and collectively levels with far reaching benefits for individuals, their families, and communities through cost-effective, trauma-informed and accessible means. Their
work sets the stage for peacebuilding that is grassroots with Colombian-driven solutions, counter to the Global North-led development model that also simultaneously challenges mainstream interpretations of yoga and the commercialized, body-centric nature of the practice. The Dunna case demonstrates sites of everyday peacebuilding and merges the need for structural societal change with opportunities for experiencing peace within one’s own body. Ultimately, this creative approach to peace paves ground for addressing some of the unspoken dimensions of conflict, offering alternative and complimentary approaches to address realities such as longstanding violence and complex trauma.
Chapter 2

2 Review of relevant peace studies literature and a trajectory of the field

This chapter identifies gaps and areas of interest in the peacebuilding sector and related literature, building the case for a deeper understanding of alternative approaches to peacebuilding in post-conflict and transitional contexts. In this pursuit, this chapter offers a broad overview of the fields of peacebuilding by exploring key theories and thinkers—identifying and analyzing both classical and contemporary arguments and trends. Furthermore, I introduce the fields of post-conflict reconstruction and transitional justice, as well as key feminist concerns surrounding peace work. Following this is an overview of transrational peace philosophy and elicitive peace work, which frame the theoretical and methodological basis of this project. Lastly, I include examples of creative and arts-based methods engaged in peacebuilding efforts worldwide, laying the foundation for a more in-depth discussion of the benefits of a mind-body focused practice like yoga in addressing some of the shortcomings of the peacebuilding sector.

2.1 Defining peace

The word ‘peace’ has varying interpretations across diverse cultures, religions, and geographic regions. Even within particular communities, definitions can be complex and depend greatly on context-specific situations and individual interpretations. Peace has commonly been understood to be the result of monumental treaties and events throughout history, such as the formal cessation of wars or the achievement of human rights. There is also a widespread understanding of peace on an individualized level: to be at peace or to behave peacefully. The etymology of the word peace derives from the Indo-European base word of “pak” which signifies “to fasten,” suggesting that peace infers stability and permanence and is a force that prevents things from falling apart (Wescott 1990, 94-97). This sentiment rings true in countless interpretations of peace; for instance, the predominant and centralized Global-North view and definition of peace as an absence of
war and violence or traditionally “eastern” interpretations of peace as harmony, balance, and tranquility (Rummel 1981). Peace, then, may refer to external or internal realities; large-scale or micro-level scenarios, situations of justice; and equilibrium for whole societies or small groups, making it difficult to conceptualize something so abstract (Rummel 1981).

In various cultures, countries, and religions, peace takes on different meanings. Some definitions are centered around individual experiences and relationships with peace, rather than broad or nationalistic ideas. For example, peace education scholar Jack Maebuta describes peace in the Solomon Islands’ culture as one of calmness, deriving from the term nowe in the Natgu language, which signifies a calm sea or still clear water (2010, 2-5). In Indonesia, the Bahasa Indonesian word for peace is damai, which relates not to broad structures or global interrelations, but to an understanding of one’s own existence (Dietrich 2012, 1-2). Wolfgang Dietrich, peace studies researcher and practitioner, describes damai as a personal orientation tool to reach inner calm and balance (Dietrich 2012, 1-2). Similarly, in the Cree language of North America, the word for peace, pêyâhtakêyimowin, signifies a peace within experienced by being quiet and taking things slowly (Vowel 2016). These varied descriptions of what peace is, allow us to conceptualize numerous expressions and understandings of peace, challenging the concept of peace as solely an absence of wartime activities and violence. This creates space for more nuanced understandings that can include not just physical violence to bodies, spaces, and infrastructure but also on emotional, spiritual, and relational levels. A more holistic understanding of peace may also include analyses of imperial and colonial violence(s) and how such longstanding and complex realities intersect and influence many conflicts globally. An expanded definition of what peace is and how peace, as a practice, might be facilitated also allows for the exploration of new methods that contribute to peace.

2.1.1 Situating my understanding of peace

It is important for me to situate my understanding of peace within the Canadian context—given my own situatedness as a Canadian scholar, working from a Canada-based research institution. The ideas and expressions of peace in this section have shaped my own
individual and collective identities and have informed the trajectory of this project that calls for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of peace and peacebuilding, internationally. In a Canadian context, peace is often framed as an outcome of justice and security efforts; a political state of being within the country; or is discussed in reference to “outward” political efforts, including international peacekeeping and humanitarian work (Mackey 1999). In my own lived experience, peace manifests in two specific ways: the first as a (foreign) policy objective, and the second as a means of maintaining (domestic) order. The notion of a Canada as “peaceful” in domestic contexts is increasingly challenged, particularly by Indigenous scholars and anti-colonial or anti-imperial scholars. The very nature of Canadian sovereignty is an act of violence against Indigenous people living in Canada (see, for example, Wood and Rossiter 2020, Tait and Ladner 2017, Coulthard 2014 and Midzain-Gobin 2019), yet is presented in the modern fashion as “peace, order and good governance”—concepts fundamental to the Canadian state’s continued existence (Lithwick 2017). As a Canadian scholar, especially one who has spent the majority of the writing of this dissertation between the unceded land and territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples (London Ontario/Western University) and of the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Campbellton/Fredericton New Brunswick), an understanding of past and ongoing colonial violence in Canada is critical.

At the time I write this, Haudenosaunee land defenders are fighting for their rights and land near the Haldimand Tract in Southern Ontario (Hosgood 2020) while Mi’kmaw fishermen in St. Mary’s Bay, Nova Scotia continue to fight both settler vigilantism and state agents as they exercise their 1752 treaty rights (Maher 2020). Alongside them, Algonquin communities in northern Quebec continue to push for a moose hunting moratorium on their lands (Greig 2020), while the Wet’suwet’en continue their legal challenge against the corporate resource exploitation initiatives proposed for their territory in British Columbia (Lukacs and Pasternak 2020). From this perspective, peace does not exist. Moreover, the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada outlined the grave genocidal structural, institutional, economic and cultural violences against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual) peoples in Canada as well
as Indigenous people more broadly (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2020). The contexts surrounding such widespread violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are marked by multigenerational trauma, as experienced, for example, in the Sixties Scoop and residential schools; high incarceration rates; police violence; a mental health crisis as seen in high suicide rates and depression; widespread poverty as seen in the lack of access to affordable groceries, transportation and fresh drinking water; as well as barriers to health services, education, employment and housing (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2020; Palmater 2015; Talaga 2017; 2018).

With respect to the former, peace also remains interwoven within the Canadian identity, especially when considering Canada’s military presence and role as a “peacekeeper” globally. The façade of the Canadian as “peaceful” relates to a moralistic understanding of peace, which reflects broader trends in western conceptualizations of peace as security, justice, and development, and a general understanding of peace as something that can be achieved but resides outside of us as beings. The public consensus on peacekeeping in Canada has generally been a positive one, resting “on a specific self-image, a coherent world view, and a set of distinctly Canadian values” (Razack 2002, 379). However, there have been events, such as the abuse of local populations by Canadian peacekeepers in peacekeeping zones, that have tarnished this cultural identity. For example, the extreme abuse and torture of local civilians in Somalia in 1992 by Canadian peacekeepers, which resulted in the dismantling of the Canadian Airborne Regiment and prompted a department-wide review of military culture, has been widely documented and is discussed by Sherene Razack (2002), a Canadian postcolonial feminist scholar. Razack describes this event as explosive to the Canadian cultural identity of “peacekeepers of the world.” The violent acts of Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia destroyed a global image of Canadian peacekeeping and identity as “non-racist” and “uninvolved in conquest [or] other imperial acts” (Razack 2002, 128).

We can also look more broadly at the context of Global North and South dynamics with respect to the way countries from these spheres are expected to interact. Representations shape knowledge and determine subject positioning; as the divided “other” and in contrast
the “moral subjects” (Mahrouse 2014, 89). Canadian critical development theorist and international aid worker Barbara Heron emphasizes this point. She writes (2007, 3) that

[T]his discourse normalizes our centering of ourselves in relation to other people’s needs, not by recognizing how we are implicated in global economic processes of globalization that underlies these needs, but by erasing the agency of local peoples who are Othered in these processes, and by presenting ‘our’ (read white middle-class Northern) knowledge, values and ways of doing things as at once preferable and right since the North, especially Canada, appears orderly, clean and well managed in comparison. In this way, our “development gaze,” in the words of Longreen, is constructed and directed.

Heron also points to the complex dimensions of this dynamic in her theorizing of “goodness” and speaks to how this is complexly interwoven with ideas of whiteness and in the pursuit of peace through development and peace work (2007, 9; 31). This, along with the social praise and neoliberal appraisal from “home,” (read Global North, ‘developed’ superior world) furthers a capacity for seeking out these spaces, these positively reinforced feelings and the associated power and status that comes with peace and development work (Heron 2007, 123-145).

The examples I have listed here are not meant to polarize western and eastern, or Global North and Global South, as they relate to philosophical thought. Nor do I seek to create divides or comparisons; rather, I simply mean to note that peace has many different meanings that are socially, politically and individually unique. From the interview findings, I offer a bird’s-eye view—within and beyond the mainstream—that will continue to be a central aim of this work. The examples above speak to the complexities of peace as a concept, a belief, a goal, and a state of being. Furthermore, I am sharing these complexities to both situate my relationship to this work as not uncomplicated as well as to explore the ethical, theoretical, and methodological considerations made throughout this research process.

In some respect, Canada and Colombia replicate the dynamic outlined above in relation to the links of colonialism and peace, and I—as a Canadian scholar—am not able to be isolated from those effects or relations (see more in Chapter 4). Within the Colombian context, violence dates back to colonial times, as early as the 16th century with violences persisting today in particular towards African Colombians and indigenous groups across
the country (Bailey 1967). The conflict also involves complex imperial relations with foreign multinational corporations, government, and aid industry entities which have reinforced and strained existing agrarian, rural and class-based struggles for decades (Thomson 2020). As such the conflict has many intersecting political, social, environmental, colonial and imperial dimensions (which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5). Mass displacement, high poverty rates, persisting gender inequality and violences, political and religious polarization, and challenges surrounding demobilization persist, despite Colombia’s efforts towards peace. These realities complicate how peace is interpreted and experienced in Colombia and in the lives of those interviewed throughout this research.

2.2 Peace and conflict studies

Peace and Conflict Studies is a relatively modern academic field of study with the first peace research institutions having been established in the 1950s, with a growth in programs in North America surging only in the 1980s after the Vietnam War (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2016). As a discipline, Peace and Conflict Studies has been shaped in a particular way, holding prevailing narratives and messages about what peace is. Specifically, in a Global North post-secondary education context, classical Peace and Conflict Studies generally focus on concepts of “world peace.” For these students, world peace is described as peace among nations and groups, such as the pursuit of democratic relations. Much of the theoretical work stemming from this discipline discusses macro-level conflicts and the attainment of peace as a state of civil order.

Peace and Conflict Studies as an academic discipline was largely conceptualized at the Oslo-based, Peace Research Institute Oslo, under one of the founding contemporary peace thinkers, Johan Galtung (Harris, Fisk and Rank 1998, 8). Galtung’s various works (see for example, 1975; 1996; 2004; 2010) have influenced the discipline for decades and continue to have relevance in academic discussions around peacebuilding today (see for example, Gill and Niens 2014; Cremin and Guilherme 2016). Global North-based academic peace studies underwent a shift from a sole focus on the more classical study of peace as an end
to violence, to what Galtung called ‘positive peace.’ Galtung called for an expansion of the study of peace to include elements of peace work such as conflict resolution, social justice, and equality (Harris, Fisk and Rank 1998, 4)—with a focus on structural and often invisible forms of conflict. As such, the discipline expanded to include aspects of peace beyond solely the consideration of conditions that allow for the cessation of direct violence (Galtung 1969). The delineation of negative peace offers a more simplistic understanding of peace as the absence of war or the end of violence, whereas positive peace addresses the more insidious forms of violence and oppression that results in discrimination and inequalities in societies. Gill and Niens explain positive peace as “characterised by conditions in a society that promote harmony between people, including respect, justice and inclusiveness, as well as ‘sustainable peace’ that incorporates processes to address the root causes of violent conflict” (2014, 11).

This shift in the study of peace is significant as it paves way for future thinkers, like those I will discuss in the pages below, who seek a more nuanced and holistic understanding of what peace means. The shift from negative to positive conceptualizations of peace (i.e., moving beyond ceasefire and peace agreements alone) allows for a broadened understanding of peace as a transformative and dynamic process with multiple actors, layers and interpretations. This broadened understanding will be central to later discussions in this research as I consider yoga as a method of peacebuilding in the complex peacebuilding landscape of Colombia. Though a peace agreement was reached in 2016 between the Government of Colombia and the FARC, many were still left asking: What is peace?

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1 Influenced by Martin Luther King’s own theorization of this distinction, as laid out in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail the discipline and the trajectory of peace-focused thinking has evolved in the decades since (Rieder 2013, 319, 480; King and Lillback 2004).

2 Today, contemporary peace thinkers that have influenced and continue to influence what we know of as Peace and Conflict Studies, such as Oliver Ramsbotham and his research on conflict resolution and humanitarian intervention (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1996; Rambotham 1998) and with John Paul Lederach’s work on applied peacebuilding (1995; 1997; 1999; 2005).
2.2.1 Critical peace studies

It is important to state that much of the mainstream and frequently cited research within peace and conflict studies derives from North American and European research institutions, with white, male authors’ perspectives being the majority (Berlowitz 2002, 61-65). However, alternative frames within peace and conflict studies are emerging. Various authors are offering critical perspectives in enhanced diversity in representation and analyses of structural violence (Farmer 2003, 42) and are shining a light on the limitations of the dominant peacebuilding paradigms in their work (see for example, Matyók, Senehi, and Byrne 2011; Alger, 2014; Richmond 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). Furthermore, much research has been conducted on incidences of mass violence that have moved the discourse from one of individual perpetrators of violence and a few “bad seeds” to acknowledging structural and group motivations for conflict (see for example, Arendt 1963; Browning 1992; Goldhagen 1997; Govier and Verwoerd 2004; Waller 2002; McDoom 2005; Short 2005; Strauss 2006; Clark 2009; Loyle 2009; and Jones 2011). These contributions call for peacebuilders to move away from binaric conceptualizations and call for more nuance and intersectionality.

This trajectory of the discipline also has pointed to the unsustainability of the peace as a ‘development’ model (commonly a top-down approach) that forges a pattern of reliance on north-south power dynamics in recent years (see for example Easterly 2006; Fontan 2012; Cole 2012; Maren 2002; Moyo 2009; and Nutt 2011). Some who espouse this critical outlook have called for an inquiry into the epistemology of dominant worldviews, which maintain the colonial layers of the peace industry that so often objectifies its “helped” subjects with sometimes-hypocritical interests (Fontan 2012, 127). Here, critical peace theorists also invite us to consider the effects of neoliberalism³ on the aid industry (Pedwell 2012, 165) and to consider models with increased accountability to the communities.

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³ A formal definition unveils neoliberalism as “a means of identifying a seemingly ubiquitous set of market-oriented policies as being largely responsible for a wide range of social, political, ecological and economic problems” (Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy 2017, 2). Please see Chapter 3 for a more in-depth explanation.
through partnership and collaboration, rather than capitalism-focused and top-down pursuits.

Similarly, the critical study of the United Nations has been documented; specifically, UN Peacekeeping and its neocolonial power dynamics (Darby 2009, 699) and accounts of sexual violence, abuse, and rape (for example, see Amnesty International 2004; Fleshman 2005; Nolen 2005; Lynch 2005; Notar 2006; Allred 2006; Higate 2007; and Defeis 2008). Theorists have also pointed to the structural racism embedded within the United Nations system (Razack 2004, 138) and have highlighted accounts of blatant impunity for crimes committed (Defeis 2008, 189-192) for international United Nations members. Reports of abuse have surfaced in several nations, notably in Bosnia, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Guinea, Haiti, and Liberia, over the past two decades (Bowcott 2005).

Peace theorist Victoria Fontan advocates for the importance of critical peace studies, noting the need for questioning “not only the motives and good intentions of self-proclaimed peacebuilders, but the systematic structures that allow for the abuse of human rights, embezzlement and corruption to take place as part of peace missions” (2012, 23). This perspective calls for a more critical assessment of the epistemological foundations of peace missions and the peace industry and question whether or not these structures are responsible. She makes the case for a different approach to peace where she states that:

Decolonizing peace calls for an introspection of all aspects of the peace industry, the transcending of a structural elite towards the formation and facilitation of endogenously sustainable communities of peace processes. It brings parts of the invisible to the forefront. It involves the dismantling of “official” narratives, asserting the first person and subjective experiences of all those involved as visible and relevant (Fontan 2012, 24).

To decolonize peace work, then, asks us to go a step further than the categories, norms, language, and prescriptions of the liberal peace paradigm introduced earlier. These frameworks have been important when considering the case of Colombia and many of the complexities of the peace process and the factors that interconnect such as race, class and gender. In the pages below, I aim to look critically at institutions and actors in the
Colombian context and also at my own role as a Global-North based scholar implicated in these dynamics.

2.2.2 Transitional justice and post-conflict research

The study of post-conflict reconstruction and transitional justice is also relevant to this work, as projects of peacebuilding and fields of research closely aligned with Peace and Conflict Studies. Klosterboer and Hartmann-Mahmud describe transitional justice as “the phenomenon and process by which a society utilizes legal and quasi-legal institutions to facilitate fundamental change from one political order to another or the construction of a new reality against the background of a profound historical memory” (2013, 57). Transitional justice mechanisms can be classified into three broad categories: (1) accountability measures such as trials and truth commissions, (2) strategies of victim restoration such as reparations and memorials, and (3) processes that promote peace and stability, such as government reform (Klosterboer and Hartmann-Mahmud 2013, 57). Emmanuel-Janvier Luzolo describes the complex interconnections between these concepts stating that “there is no peace without reconciliation; there is no reconciliation without justice; there is no justice without reparations; there are no reparations without forgiveness; there is no forgiveness without truth” (cited in van Zyl 2008, 1).

Many have discussed why transitional justice matters (International Centre for Transitional Justice 2012; Hodzick 2012); how broad or localized mechanisms should be (Lundy and McGovern 2008; McEvoy and McGregor 2008; and Rowen 2017); and have debated what should be included or excluded within the discipline (Shaw, Waldorf and Hazan 2010, 5). The field continues to grow, and much critical literature is emerging, which seeks to expand the narrower and legalistic definitions of transitional justice (see for example, Kritz 1995; Turner 2013; Bell, Campbell and Ni Aoláin 2007; and Ni Aoláin 2009). Others are exploring the benefits of grassroots and traditional mechanisms as opposed to externally imposed models (Quinn 2009, 175). Bell, Campbell, and Ni Aoláin (2007) point to the ways in which the field of transitional justice is rapidly changing and is persistent in considering a wide range of methods, including the study of truth commissions and ethical-legal debates surrounding human rights. Bell et al. attest that in today’s transitional justice,
a legal frame of reference is one part of a broader dimension and that transitional justice
debates need to move beyond simply “dealing with the past”—the past being one part of
a broader transformative package for social change (Bell, Campbell, and Ní Aoláin 2007, 82). Others have echoed this and called for more nuanced and critical approaches, while
speaking to the limitations of specific mechanisms such as restorative justice, (for example,
Curtis-Fawley and Daly 2005; Daly and Stubbs 2006) criminal courts (Nowrojee 2007),
truth commissions (Nesiah 2006) and legal reparations (Rubio-Marín 2006; Couillard
2007; Zoglin 2007; and Hallet 2009).

The critical role of memory and memorialization after conflicts has also been widely noted
(see for example, Hayner 2003; Henry 2011; Burnett 2012; Ycaza and Fox 2013; and
Stockwell 2014). Various mechanisms of post-conflict reconstruction exist and are not
solely limited to transitional justice efforts, such as economic rebuilding efforts or civil
society mobilization. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, national reconciliation
efforts have involved efforts such as memorialization and equal access to jobs and
education (Pearlman and Staub 2015, 20). It has been widely noted that post-conflict
reconstruction should not only involve the rebuilding and restructuring of physical capital,
but also of psychological and social dimensions.

Furthermore, although it has roots in political science as a study of societies emerging from
dictatorship, many of the critical engagements within transitional justice derive from
feminist legal scholarship (Turner 2013, 194). As such, several gender-based and feminist
analyses of post-conflict measures have been made (Bell and O’Rourke 2007; Ní Aoláin,
Haynes, and Cahn 2011; and Oosterveld 2012); specifically, with attention drawn to
violence against women (McWilliams and Ní Aoláin 2013; Curtis-Fawley and Daly 2005;
and Kelsall and Stepakoff 2007). Moreover, the call has been made by several for the
incorporation of feminist (Bell, Campbell, and Ní Aoláin 2007; Rosser 2007; Baines 2011;
Bell and O’Rourke 2007; Ní Aoláin 2009; and Rimmer 2010), postcolonial (Rosser 2007;
Husanovic 2009; and Murray 2009), and intersectional (Rooney 2006; Ní Aoláin and
Rooney 2007; and Samararatne and Soldatic 2015) ways of understanding transitional
justice and post-conflict reconstruction. For example, Bell and O’Rourke (2007, 24)
emphasize how many of the legal standards that transitional justice mechanisms draw on
are exclusionary, arguing that women’s exclusions from these forums are not due to a lack of demand for accountability from women.

Furthermore, scholars within this field have raised the concern that beyond the need for increased inclusion of women, we must consider how masculinity functions, specifically when we consider violent masculinities (Hamber 2007; McWilliams and Ni Aoláin 2013). For example, a deeper understanding of masculinity within transitional justice allows for the enhanced understanding of phenomena such as intimate partner violence, which is often viewed as separate from the violences being considered as part of transitional justice mechanisms, but which has important links (Hamber 2007, 382).

2.2.3 Feminist contributions to peace studies

Feminist peace studies, including the influence feminists have had and continue to have on the trajectory of peace thinking and work, fundamentally informs this work. It should not be surprising that there are many intersections between the fields of peace studies and women’s studies, as a feminist lens has historically been consequential to the advancement of peace-based research praxis. Various organizations as well as academic and research institutions have shown increasing interest in women’s experiences in peace and conflict settings and their relationship to peacebuilding efforts. Feminist scholarship has both responded to and informed the multitude of definitions and expressions of peace worldwide.4

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4 A brief history of feminist work related to international peace offers insights into the historical rootedness and relevance of the study of peace within the academic women’s studies frame. The period from 1900 to 1945 focused heavily on women’s lack of political power as a barrier to peace and achieving suffrage was a key concern for women in the Global North (Jenkins and Reardon 2007, 210). The time period of 1945 to 1970 contributed valuable advances in terms of women’s legal rights and, during this period, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was established (Jenkins and Reardon 2007, 2010). The United Nations effort for women’s equality, entitled the International Decade for Women, in addition to several conferences linking themes of women and peace manifested between 1975 and 1985 (Jenkins and Reardon 2007, 210). Possibly the most significant contribution during this time period was the adoption of CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Moreover, the first academic inquiries into feminist considerations in peace studies were made during this period. Further, the 1995 Beijing Conference was extremely significant for the advancement of women’s rights globally due to its ability to bring together women’s rights advocates from around the world (United Nations, 2007). 30,000 women’s rights activists gathered at this UN World Conference on Women and gained much success in
Grewal and Kaplan’s introduction to their comprehensive anthology, *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (2006, xxii), proposes that transnational links should form a crucial part of feminist thinking, working, and writing, as several authors explore how feminism can and does work across cultural divides. As a sub-discipline and movement which has aimed to offer a postcolonial alternative to global feminism, transnational feminism requires critically confronting the historicity and positioning of the varied meanings of transnationality (Swarr and Nagar 2010, 4). Transnational feminist scholars argue, instead, for “a transnational feminist praxis that is critically aware of its own historical, geographical, and political locations, even as it is invested in alliances that are created and sustained through deeply dialogic and critically self-reflexive processes of knowledge production and dissemination” (Swarr and Nagar 2010, 3). Further, transnational feminist scholars have suggested collaboration over individualistic pursuits as a means to overcome the status quo and as necessary in rethinking transnational feminist frameworks through the creation of new avenues for political and scholarly initiatives outside disciplinary borders (Swarr and Nager 2010, 2).

Valentine Moghadam suggests that globalization offers both great opportunity and many challenges, with a complex intersection of greater communication prospects with exacerbated inequalities in economic and social exchanges (2005, 19). She explains that globalization allows women to unite around common issues and goals, yet also notes the importance of understanding how the global landscape in which women advocate is inherently unequal and that this challenges relations between transnational feminist activists (2005, 19). Notably, Chandra Mohanty (2003) offers a critical look at globalization and urges the feminist movement to focus on anti-capitalist struggles. She presents important insights in exploring the possibilities (and potential limitations) of transnational solidarity and global feminist peace work in the current social system through a postcolonial, anti-capitalist, and decolonial lens (Mohanty 2003, 3). Mohanty explains that a strategy of decolonial feminism “involves a careful critique of the ethics and politics gender mainstreaming at other events which has helped in the transnational exchange and spread of feminist ideals (Friedman 2003, 313).
of Eurocentrism and a corresponding analysis of the difficulties and joys of crossing cultural, national, racial and class boundaries in the search for feminist communities anchored in justice and equality” (Mohanty 2003, 11).

Theorists and practitioners have also pointed to the complexities of transnational feminist engagements around peace (see for example Anderson 2010; Snyder 2005; and Nornader and Hater 2012) and the struggles women face at various levels of peace processes across varying geopolitical boundaries, such as a lack of formal representation (Cockburn 2013, 157-158). Transnational feminism studies also consider how diaspora communities are gaining momentum and are one of the key forces reshaping contemporary international relations and development trends. For example, migration of many kinds can produce complex transnational and diasporic communities which ties people across borders together for various reasons such as financial and social affiliations with other nationals and can be upheld by travel and communication technologies (Dahre 2007, 8). It is important to acknowledge the broad range and varying types of relationships between local and diaspora populations that may be based on ethnic and cultural ties or political and economic factors that one cannot ignore when considering the transnational aspects of peacebuilding and women’s rights organizing globally (Zack-Williams 1995, 356).

Furthermore, beginning in the 1990s there was a surge of interest in the study of gender and women’s issues more broadly, such as the development of the field of masculinity studies, which aided in facilitating a more direct link between concerns within the peace industry and gender issues and disparities. In the year 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (United Nations 2014). It has primarily been in the two decades since that serious inquiries into feminist concerns in peace research have been made, resulting in the formation and expansion of relevant work within women’s studies as a discipline. More recently, sexual violence in conflict and rape as a weapon of war (see for example, Nowrojee, Thomas and Fleischman 1996; Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp 2011; Autesserre 2012; Nator 2006; Baaz and Stern 2013; and Kirby 2013) have been the subject of pressing discussions, with institutions coming under scrutiny for gender-based violences beyond individual actors in conflict (see for example, Puechguirbal 2003). It is important to note, however, that these realities and
experiences are far from new tactics used during wartime. Much attention has been drawn to the relationship between militarization and masculinities (see for example, Ashe and Harland 2014; Baaz 2009; Belkin and Carver 2012; Higate 2007; and Lopes 2011) and these studies draw connections with global patriarchal structures and institutions (such as in, Whitworth 2004; Enloe 2000; and Higate 2007). Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe speaks to the idea of a militarized masculinity, suggesting that feminists and researchers across the globe “have all found that when they have followed the bread crumbs of privileged masculinity, they have been led time and time again not just to the doorstep of the military, but to the threshold of all those social institutions that promote militarization” (Enloe 2000, 33).

Moreover, Lisa S. Price states that it is imperative to move past simply framing militarized masculine sexual oppression as “mad” or “bad” (2001, 211). This limiting construct individualizes and pathologizes deeply complex and socially informed behaviors that dismiss the social, normalized, and widespread dimensions of abusive male sexual acts (Price 2001, 211-212). Viewing this behaviour as social, rather than as isolated offences by psychologically inept individuals, reveals “a series of structural contingencies shaping [men’s] sexualized power interactions with vulnerable others” (Higate 2007, 111). Various theorists have also discussed the role of women in armed conflict as perpetrators of violence—not solely as the common trope of ‘passive victims’ (see for example, Coulter 2014). Research has also pointed to the ways in which women are resourceful and resilient in various capacities during times of war and peace, by detailing their unique lived experiences and perceptions that differ from the mainstream and masculine gaze (Veneracion-Rallonza 2015, 35-40); challenging essentialist and stereotypical roles women undertake (El-Bushra 2007; Haeri and Puechguirbal 2010; Cockburn 2013; and Robinson 2014).

Much has been written about women’s inclusion in peacebuilding, the need for feminist consciousness within the field (Enloe 2004; Enloe 2014; and Puechguirbal 2012), and the notion that the process of peacebuilding is inherently gendered (De La Rey and McKay 2006; Jenkins and Reardon 2007). Others have noted the lack of representation of women in peace-related decision-making globally. Most notably, the controversies related to
women’s representation in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and an overall lack of effectiveness of the resolution have also been the subject of scholarly discussion (Otto 2006; Richter-Devroe and Pratt, 2011). A lack of female representation in international peacekeeping efforts (Henry 2012; Krishnasamy 2010) as well as the complexities in integrating feminist knowledge into peacekeeping spaces (Reeves 2012, 352) have been discussed. Research within the last several years has also drawn attention to girls’ unique roles as peacebuilders, arguing that their rights and education are bound up with the peace of a nation or region (McKay and Mazurana 2004; Carella 2011; Glass 2012; Monkman and Hoffman 2013; and Switzer 2013).

Complementary scholarship that also lies on the margins of mainstream peace studies, deriving from other disciplines such as women’s studies and cultural studies on relevant topics such as postcolonial feminist theory, bridges discussions of gender and colonialism in discussions of power (Ali 2007, 207). Critical conversations surrounding the construction of otherness and victim narratives both within and beyond feminist spaces rely on the rhetoric of salvation of one group of women by another (Abu-Lughod 2002, 788). Further, several have addressed these concerns more broadly, urging for the need to redefine global feminist politics and addressing the hierarchy and power dynamics embedded within them, stressing the importance of including non-western feminist voices in international and global forums and conversations (see for example, Trinh 1988; Narayan 1997; Narayan 2000; and Mohanty 2003).

2.3 Peacebuilding as a relational process

As Jennifer Llewellyn succinctly writes, “institutions and processes will be important, but only in so far as they can facilitate the relationships needed in particular contexts to enable and promote human flourishing and contribute to lasting and sustainable peace” (Llewellyn 2012, 301). A relational understanding of peace in this context does not “focus on the collective at the expense of, or in contrast/conflict with, the individual. It offers, instead, a relational picture of the individual, one that places relationships at the core as fundamental and formative” (Llewellyn 2012, 294). A relational understanding of peace, rather than a
strictly rational, linear or technical one, infers drawing from our relational and interpersonal nature as human beings and is central to this research.

A relational understanding of peace aims to transcend superficial or broad layers of a conflict, moving beyond aspects of a peace process such as democratic reformation and infrastructure repair alone. Instead, the ability to relate to the “other” in times of conflict and injustice can be seen as critical in restorative and reconciliatory approaches to peacebuilding. These interpersonal and community connections, according to Lederach, are a critical part of the basis for sustainable peace from the bottom up (Lederach 2005, 49). Moreover, this approach to peace acknowledges the embodied and personal nature of peace and peacebuilding. Jeff Aguiar (2019, 2) explains that researchers and practitioners of peace must consider the following:

[The somatic impact of violence in conflict, something Galtung (1969) references as a negative correlative measure of peace and an inevitable outcome of warfare, escalatory strategies, and even, social stability. That trauma continues to emerge as a lasting effect for anyone involved in conflict and seems a valid reason to explore the richness of the intrapersonal.]

Building peace in this understanding then, confers a sense of relationality—a sense of “beyond the self” and this, I argue below, is expressly at the foundations of yoga in peacebuilding.

2.4 Transrational peace

The Innsbruck School of Peace Studies identifies the plurality of peace(s) to account for the undercurrents of conflict and post-conflict realities and the intricacies of human nature and relations. Their conceptual understanding of peace is constructed by five key peace “families”: (1) energetic peace, (2) moral peace, (3) modern peace, (4) postmodern peace, and (5) transrational peace (Echavarría Álvarez 2014). Energetic peaces can be understood as a unification of opposites and revolve around facilitating a sense of harmony and balance

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5 More detailed explanations of the five peace families can be found in on the UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies Resource Website: https://www.uibk.ac.at/peacestudies/and in the work of authors Echavarría Álvarez (2014) and Dietrich (2012; 2013).
and hold a spiritual component (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016b). Within the
category of moral peaces, the material world is perceived as interconnected, yet, unlike
energetic peaces, the realm of the divinities remains separate and superior. Within moral
peaces, “polarities are interpreted as dualisms between true and false, good and evil, right
and wrong” (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016c). Modern peaces are mechanical or
rudimentary and rationality is the primary founding principle, as opposed to a god, which
we see in moral understandings. Here the universe “functions like a machine according to
eternal laws of cause and effect” (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016d). This is
witnessed in how we organize nations and societies, with peace as a final promise or end
goal that is reinforced by “a linear understanding of history guided by a belief in progress
and enlightenment, development or civilization” (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies
2016d). Postmodern peaces are, on the other hand, the critical counterpart to moral peaces
and no longer believe in the promise of modernity that have resulted in harm such as the
promise of security. Postmodern understandings remain “small, local and contextual” and
value the multiplicity of lived experiences (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016e).
Lastly—and most important to this project—is the model of transrational peaces that value
plurality and multiplicity, but also reintegrate the spiritual component to an understanding
of peacebuilding.

The word “transrational,” then, implies having passed through the rational. Yet, it
acknowledges peace as one possible mode of perception and does not proclaim ultimate
reason while acknowledging the complexity of the human experience (UNESCO Chair for
Peace Studies 2016f). The five peace families identified by the UNESCO Chair are useful
in conceptualizing different understandings of what peace means as they play out in
societies (though of course albeit detailed, does still not fully encapsulate all that peace is).
A transrational understanding of peace encapsulates the different “perceptions and
interpretations of peace in history and culture,” combining the elements of the peace
families in a holistic equilibrium, which is reflective of the complex intersections of these
types of peace in everyday life (Dietrich 2014, 48-49). A transrational understanding of
peace brings us closer to understanding how these different belief systems can and do
intersect when we consider yoga as a means of building peace. A transrational
understanding of peace also arguably calls for understanding the various layers of a
conflict, from both macro-level and structural to individual experiences and interrelations. Hilary Cremin, Josefina Echavarría, and Kevin Kester (2018, 295) explain that:

[I]t is not only rationality that is relevant for our comprehension of peace. As human beings we are rational, yet also so much more, so that peace has embodied, emotional and spiritual dimensions, as well as mental ones. Transrationality is thus an understanding that includes rationality and critical discernment but is also open to systemic and transpersonal approaches.

An understanding of the transrational nature of peace and peacebuilding lends to the idea that yoga might be used to support peacebuilding processes. Yoga can be explored as one of the many non-traditional tools with the potential to facilitate both relationship building and introspection through the development of a peaceful mindset and by the participation in a shared, community-driven experience (see Dietrich 2012; Kumar 2010; and Lefurgey 2017). In sum, transrational peace philosophy aims to combine the modern and post-modern developments of the peacebuilding sector with very human properties, such as emotion or spirituality that sometimes get lost in technicality. This, arguably holistic offering, calls for an epistemological shift in how peace is studied, practiced, understood, and embodied. This dissertation argues that yoga is an example of transrational peacebuilding and is a method with potential for systemic change and societal reform with a bottom-up, embodied, and holistic approach. This is explored further in Chapter 6.

2.4.1 Elicitive conflict transformation

The applied methodology of transrational peace philosophy is referred to as “elicitive conflict transformation” (Dietrich 2012). “Elicitive” is a term that derives from the verb “to elicit,” which signifies a “bringing forward” (Dietrich 2013, 10). First specified by theorist John Paul Lederach (1995), elicitive peace work derives from Lederach’s personal experiences working in Central America, and the objections he developed to the modernist idea of there being the possibility for neutral, external, or third party, mediators in conflicts. His approach to peacebuilding challenged the idea of the outside expert’s role in transforming the conflicts of others (Dietrich 2013, 181). The term had previously been used in Gestalt therapy, humanistic psychology, and neurolinguistic programming as synonymous with the term “evocative” (Dietrich 2013, 14). In his work on elicitive peace work, Lederach explores and engages an understanding of conflict transformation that
seeks to go beyond academic and practitioner-based boundaries in an effort to bring Peace and Conflict Studies as a field beyond some of the methodological confines of international relations and classical peace studies work (Dietrich 2013, 19).

In peacebuilding, a traditional, prescriptive model assumes that the expert in the situation knows what their audience needs and, even though there may be a few “options” or courses of actions defined by the expert, there is a pre-set agenda or plan with methods or ideas that have been previously developed. This approach is ultimately centered around ideas of transferability and universality with pre-defined needs and optional solutions provided (Lederach 1995, 53). Lederach calls the unspoken motto of the prescriptive model “we have just what you need” (1995, 47). Conversely, the elicitive approach does not require a “master plan” of conflict transformation, or the presence of a “third-party expert” offering a remedy to conflict. Instead, elicitive peace work envisions an integrative framework wherein people are key resources, local knowledge is central, empowerment results from high levels of participation, and where processes are built with local resources to foster self-sufficiency (Lederach 1995, 31).

According to Lederach, conflict resolution needs to be conceived of as a long-term system and the lives of those who make up this system need to be considered thoughtfully (1995, 112; 1997, 127). A key component of such a long-term and rooted process is the recognition that citizens and members of a community are, and can be, seen as “resources” and agents, rather than “recipients.” The aim of the model is to foster a local, self-nourishing, and insider approach, rather than an externally imposed peace process (Maiese 2004). Sean Byrne and Jessica Senehi interpret Lederach’s elicitive model as one where the outsider is not perceived as an expert by the community and where the process is rather about mutuality in relationships and community building (2008, 121). Moreover, as Dietrich describes, “whoever works on a conflict, or even just observes it, becomes part of it and is, therefore, no longer neutral” (Dietrich 2013, 11). Elicitive conflict transformation, then, “draws on the common knowledge, values and communication techniques that exist in the individuals, groups or communities concerned” (Dietrich 2013, 10). Conflicts are concerned with people and have the ability to shape and change people’s perception of
themselves and others, which relates to what Lederach calls the psychosocial nature of a conflict (Lederach 1995).

Elicitive approaches to peace work and research build on existing communally held knowledge related to transforming conflict between individuals, groups, and communities, as compared to a prescriptive approach which imposes pre-created models (Dietrich 2012). Dietrich and the Innsbruck School for Peace Studies draw and expand upon Lederach’s work to understand conflict transformation and the need to integrate the micro-level (personal and interpersonal) dimensions of a conflict into the bigger picture or surface-level understanding (Dietrich 2012; 2013; 2014; Echavarría Alvarez 2014; and UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016a). In elicitive conflict transformation, there is no “recipe” or ideal toolkit that can be taken from one scenario and seamlessly replicated in another by following a pre-determined set of methods or guides (Dietrich 2013, 226). It is, rather, only through relationality among individuals and conflicting parties that elicitive methods and elicitive peace work ignite. Moreover, “elicitive conflict transformation does not work toward pre-determined goals, but instead brings peace workers and leaders into exchanges and interactions. In the process, the available choices increase, while the self-organization of the system remains intact” (Dietrich 2013, 226). Elicitive methods aim to “offer a safe space for the parties, in which they can work on changes in their relationships along the horizons of their own intelligibility” (Echavarría Álvarez 2014, 58). The support for this sense of connectedness and collective interrelationship among individuals as a part of experiencing and creating peace is growing momentum and is evidenced in community-driven projects, such as Dunna’s work with yoga and movement in Colombia. This is explored further in Chapters 4-6.

2.4.2 Tools of elicitive peace work

The toolkit of applied and embodied methods found under the umbrella of elicitive conflict transformation continues to grow in the web of connections and their inclusion in curriculum at the UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies and MA Program in Peace Studies at the University of Innsbruck (and elsewhere). Elicitive methods are defined by the UNESCO Chair to include a wide range of “breath-oriented, voice-oriented, and
movement-oriented techniques that have been developed in the frame of humanistic psychology, yoga, martial arts, dance, dynamic meditation, psychodrama, expressive theatre and more” (Dietrich 2014, 55).

Moreover, Dietrich explains how yoga philosophy has informed the development of transrational peace research as a broader discipline. Transrational peace research encapsulates the shift in modern peace studies to more relational and community driven approaches to solving conflicts. When discussing this shift, Dietrich compares conflicts-as-a-process to yoga by noting that this process is a practice in learning how “yoga presents the chakras as mutually corresponding energy centers whose harmonious flow is referred to as peace” and explaining how disruptions on any level of a conflict can result in a state of conflict for the entire system (Dietrich 2013, 39). Kumar further explains the transrational and holistic nature of yoga as a practice explaining that, “yoga is the complete integration of all conditions of mind, intellect, senses, emotions, instincts and all levels of personality. It is a process of becoming whole” (2010, 30).

Finally, Lederach’s later work discusses social healing and how the concept relates to both the “idiosyncrasies of individual healing and the ephemeral promise of fully restored relationships” speaking the relationship between personal and the collective healing (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 208). Lederach and Lederach (2010) describe the concept of social healing as “the capacity of communities and their respective individuals to survive, locate voice and resiliently innovate spaces of interaction that nurture meaningful conversation and purposeful action in the midst and aftermath of escalated and structural violence” (2010, 208). In this understanding, social healing is a multidirectional and non-linear process that centers lived experience. It is a process through which individuals can build resilience individually while collectively working towards broader ideas of social change (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 209). While national level reconciliation and

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6 Examples of breath-oriented elicitive methods include Stannislav Grof and Sulvester Walch’s work on Holotropic Breathwork. Dietrich also gives Marshall Rosenberg’s modality of non-violent communication as a form of voice oriented breathwork (Dietrich 2013). Moreover, movement-oriented techniques might include theatre or dance as evidenced in examples such as David Diamond’s Theatre of the Living program or Gabrielle Roth’s 5 Rhythms Dance technique. For more details see Dietrich 2014, 45-73 (breath); 74-111 (voice); and 112-151 (movement) (Dietrich 2013).
peacebuilding can lend momentum to smaller-scale healing, exclusively top-down approaches, with low buy-in from citizens often have a low impact in terms of social healing, remaining symbolic rather than becoming integrated into “real-life relationships” (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 211). These core peace studies thinkers and philosophies inform the basis of the methodology as well as the theoretical lens that shapes the analysis of this research project.

2.5 Creative approaches to peacebuilding

Evidence is growing that creative methods for working toward peace can facilitate inviting participants to move beyond dualisms, strict realms of right and wrong, and conceptualizations of justice and truth. Creative solutions for peace may be effective as tools when conventional transitional justice and reconciliation methods of persecution and punishment are lacking or are simply not possible due to the nature of a given conflict where restorative options may be beneficial (Llewellyn 2012, 301).

Non-traditional mechanisms of post-conflict reconstruction that are arts-based have been emerging as alternative outlets for dealing with the past. April Hyoeun Bang explains that, “arts-based approaches can facilitate transformative learning and thereby help people develop or enhance their capacities for more constructive engagement with conflict and build more cooperative relationships” (2016, 371). Across the globe, methods such as art (Heley 2010; Mani 2011; and Sanger 2013), theatre (Simic 2010; Simic and Milošević 2014; and Aguiar 2019), music (Lederach and Lederach 2010; Bingley 2011; Ndaliko 2012; and García 2014), and dance (Harris 2002; Monteiro and Wall 2011; Siapno 2012; and Dunphy, Elton and Jordan 2014) are engaged in conflict transformation and peacebuilding both within and alongside traditional post-conflict efforts.

For example, the Dah Theatre in Belgrade, Serbia, works on issues of truth, justice, and reconciliation, using the traditional elements of theatre “to create a full-blooded relationship with historical events” (Simic and Milošević 2014, 101). The role of theatre in this case is an essential part of community healing and conflict transformation. The Dah Theatre Company became an avenue for opposing violence during the former Yugoslavian
conflict as an outlet to break the silence and was a space through which to understand “the other” and encourage solidarity. Their work defies linearity both in conflict and in the post-conflict period. More so, their work problematizes dominant discourses of justice, fusing the technical with the relational and embodies “testimonies that could be used in the courtroom, visceral human experiences that, through art, are told to us as bare truth” (Simic 2010, 119; 127). Similarly, dance therapy has been engaged as an effective tool for peacebuilding work done in Timor-Leste, providing participants an outlet to engage with the powerful tradition of dance in their communities, as well as find an outlet for personal and collective healing from complex trauma in a post-conflict reality (Dunphy et al. 2014, 189).

The Colombian NGO, La Familia Ayara, facilitates Rap Debate, a creative outlet for youth that combines hip-hop music and formal argumentation skills as a “mediation strategy to provoke critical thought and peaceful solutions to violence,” teaching both “young and poor to assert themselves in public spaces where they are traditionally excluded from or beleaguered by authorities” (Thomas 2019, 479). The project centralizes youth as peacebuilding actors and creatively re-shapes the narrative of “at-risk” youth, engaging music as a tool for building peace (Thomas 2019, 478). Through Rap Debate, participants create and embody peace, while speaking back to and imagining beyond what society has offered them—experiencing and facilitating social healing through public performance (Thomas 2019, 480). One participant’s testimonial explains (Thomas 2019, 489):

[T]he peace process is not only what happens in Havana between the government and armed groups, but rather the peace process is what is made in the community. In the day to day, we are generators of peace through hip-hop, saying that a kid should not resolve his problems with punches, or knives, or bullets. [Peace] is seeing the value of weapons of music, dance and graffiti.

Although arts-based examples are prevalent and taking stage in various locations across the globe and in a wide range of modalities (visual art, dance, yoga, creative writing, theatre and so on), there are significantly fewer empirical studies on these modalities (Bang 2016, 371). More research and engagement are needed not only to offer description of the creative methods that exist but explanations as to, “how artistic engagement could foster cooperative relationships and more constructive engagement with conflict even in the most
difficult situations” (Bang 2016, 371). Evaluating art-based peacebuilding can be difficult, given the creative and fluid nature of many of the techniques that are often more process-oriented, rather than results-focused (Beller 2009, ii).

Similarly, literature is also emerging on the benefits of sport for peace and development worldwide, which is relevant when considering yoga as a peace practice, given that yoga embodies both the physical and group-centered aspects of the practice. Sugden and Tomlinson (2018) discuss the ways in which sport has divided societies, but also the power it holds as an outlet for addressing deep social tensions and long-standing divides in communities. Exploring case studies such as Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and South Africa, they discuss the complexity of conflicts and the ways that sports can be an outlet to transform conflicts, with the lived reality of peacebuilding being complex and fluid (Sugden and Tomlinson 2018, 132). They discuss Lederach’s web approach to understanding conflict that emphasizes the importance of relationship building, noting that in sport, “playing with the enemy is more than just a catchphrase: it is a vital strategy for the survival of sport as a credible source of inter-cultural understanding in an increasingly volatile and troubled global order” (Sugden and Tomlinson 2018, 132). Sports, in this sense, have the ability to help individuals rehumanize one another and rebuild relationships between individuals, organizations, and conflicting parties (Sugden and Tomlinson 2018, 118).

Sport for peacebuilding has been discussed as a form of “soft power” in international diplomacy and peacebuilding such as providing a platform for dialogue, trust-building, and reconciliation between individuals and even between nations, for example, the Olympics or the World Cup (Nygård and Gates 2013, 235). The United Nations, the Millennium Development Goals, and several non-profit organizations globally, such as Right to Play, have popularized and concretized sport for peace and development as a viable and impactful route in conflict and post-conflict realities (Schnitzer, Steohenson, Zanotti, and Stivachtis. 2013, 595, 597). The engagement of sport has been useful in advocating for gender equality and HIV/AIDS education and prevention (Schnitzer et al. 2013, 598). The efficacy of sports for peacebuilding is of course contextual and largely ungeneralizable, as the risks of any peacebuilding/development project remain. These include the potential
replication of colonial relationships, reinforcing violent patterns, or providing a top-down and disconnected approach to rebuilding communities (Schnitzer et al. 2013, 606). As with arts-based methods for peacebuilding, a streamlined analysis of results is not possible, due to the wide range of projects that exist globally with much variance in the form of conflict sport engages with and even the type of sport intervention itself. Moreover, the field is still emerging and is undertheorized despite its popularity in praxis (Schnitzer et al. 2013, 608).

2.6 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has offered a broad literature review of the fields of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, supplemented by an overview of relevant feminist thinking and insights within these fields. By offering a landscape of the current state of affairs and an introduction to key topics, themes, and subject areas, this chapter lays a foundation for exploring alternative and mind-body integrated methods of peacebuilding through drawing on and expanding within the philosophical discipline of transrational peace philosophy and its applied methodology of elicitive peace work. Conventional peace theory and praxis are increasingly being met with criticism and the ways in which we commonly understand and work towards peace globally are being challenged. Many of the authors discussed in this chapter call for a new peacebuilding paradigm. Building on the work of transrational peace philosophy and elicitive peace work as a foundation, the following chapters explore possible avenues to do things differently and offer a case study that reimagines the possibility for peace and post-conflict transformation.
Chapter 3

3 Turned on its head: unpacking yoga’s complexities as a method of peacebuilding

To contextualize this research, it is critical to understand both the history of yoga as it relates to peace and its integration into everyday life through popular culture in many regions around the world (especially in recent years). Understandably, there is growing academic interest in yoga with respect to how it relates to a variety of topics at the intersection of yoga and peacebuilding, such as popular culture and consumerism (Jain 2014, 3); western fitness goals (Kirk, Boon and DiTuro 2004); and neoliberal ideas of self-governance (Lavrence and Lozanski 2014). As we understand it today, yoga relates not only to popular culture but to many other sectors within modern society. For example, the relationship between yoga and modern western medicine continues to grow (Chaoul and Cohen 2010; Mathew 2001; and Rao, Rao, Raghuram, Nagendra, Gopinath, Srinath, Diwakar, Patil, Bilimagga, and Varambally 2009) and the practice has been studied widely as a tool for mental wellness (Cuomo 2007; Shannahoff-Khalsa 2010; Simpkins and Simpkins 2011; Culver 2014; Miyata, Okanoya and Kawai 2015; and Cadigan 2014). Yoga is similarly studied for its efficacy in aiding those experiencing various forms of trauma (West 2011; Spinazzola, Rhodes, Emerson, Earle, and Monroe 2011; Alvardo 2013; and Jindani 2014) as well as for individuals struggling with self-representation and identity issues (Buchanan 2014).

Yoga’s reach is vast and constantly evolving. Mar Griera explains that “there is no clear estimate of the real magnitude of the so-called ‘yoga boom’ but there are strong indicators of its increasing expansion worldwide” (2017, 78). Its sheer prevalence and continued growth across the globe make it a thought-provoking subject of academic inquiry, a space of sociological interest, and, correspondingly, an ever-changing site of contradiction (Berila 2016a, 1). Where there is a reproduction and cooptation of cultural ideas, coupled with the fast spread of a practice that is easily consumable by the human imagination, and subsequently commercial markets, there will inevitably be debate and contestation. Yoga
as we know it today echoes feminist concerns relating to power dynamics, cultural relations, community/individualism, belonging/isolation, identity, body politics, social locatedness, and social change (Berila 2016a, 1).

This chapter presents the various meanings and understandings of yoga, both past and present, as well as the connections between yoga philosophy and narratives of peacebuilding, historically, to form a basis for understanding yoga in the context of peace and social transformation. By nuancing the practice and the associated ideologies of yoga culture, the contradictions but also the possibilities/benefits of this practice become clearer. For example, looking critically at the various meanings behind yoga as it is understood in a modern, global north context also creates space to consider the role of yoga as a tool for peacebuilding in various cultural, socio-economic, and geographic regions around the world. This chapter ponders this further, considering the athletic practice of yoga—as it is popularly understood in the global north—in contrast against a fuller, understanding of yoga as an elicitive method and an example of transrational peacebuilding holding the potential for both individual and social transformation. I aim to juxtapose yoga as a method for peace with insights about the current landscape of mainstream or commercial yoga, considering what it means to engage with a method so saturated in consumerism, celebrity-culture, and neoliberal ideas of self-betterment as a medium in reconciliatory and post-conflict work. Following this critique of modern yoga, I explore some of the counter-hegemonic responses to this dominant representation of yoga that range from my analysis of critical yoga studies as an emerging field to yoga as activism or protest, and to a practice for incarcerated persons. Lastly, I explore several concrete examples of practice-based examples of yoga within the context of peace work and conflict transformation in various geographic, cultural, and social settings.

3.1 Historical context and relationship to peacebuilding

The word ‘yoga’ itself is complex and has more meanings than almost any other in the Sanskrit lexicon. Of this multitude of meaning, yoga can signify union, discipline, and a sum total (White 2011, 2). Beyond vocabulary, yoga assumes many different types of practices and exercises, with various scholars debating its historical aims and origins,
sacredness, applications, and appropriations across a wide variety of geopolitical, spiritual, and cultural locations and spaces. What yoga *is* ranges from the definitions posed by ancient traditions, oftentimes with spiritual ties, to the mainstream rudiments of this practice that are found in present day consumer cultures that treat yoga as a popular trend. The most widely consumed and recognized image of ‘yogi’ culture and yoga practice primarily involves physical postures known as āsanas.

Scholars and practitioners have, however, asserted that yoga is far more than its modern aesthetic interpretation and that its physical postures are only one element of a larger holistic model. Some scholars have ascribed the practice to even broader definitions, such as “any method that allow[s] us to wake up to who or what we really are” (Saraswati 2016). Other scholars have argued that the forms of yoga popular today are exceedingly far removed from their Indian and spiritual roots and that this now-mainstream type of yoga dates back only to the last 150 years—a very short chapter in the much-longer history (White 2011). The difficulty in conceptualizing the practice, especially given its global variation in expression and interpretation, is largely because each modern yoga company, discipline, or guru has their own distinctive beliefs of both what yoga is and what it is not. The moral, spiritual, and socio-political moorings of contemporary and historical understandings of yoga—both the understandings and applications—are foundational to discussing yoga’s potential as a tool and path for modern-day peacebuilding.

Yoga’s longstanding relationship to peace can be traced to Patañjali’s *Yogaśāstra* or *Yoga Sūtra* (the yoga sūtras and their commentary). Compiled by Patañjali between 300 and 500 CE, Patañjali’s *Yogaśāstra* is a foundational and historically influential text for yoga practitioners and scholars (Singleton 2010; White 2014). Patañjali’s *Yogaśāstra* is often regarded as an authoritative script and outlines the eight limbs of yoga or guidelines for living a purposeful life (Maas 2013). Upon close examination, Patañjali’s *sūtras* have a “rhythm and flow that return like a spiral to the Yoga’s central theme: overcoming negative karma and obtaining freedom from affliction” (Chapple 2008, x). Patañjali argued that the principles learned through yoga can be applied more broadly to life and the human experience and transcend far beyond the physical body (Chapple 2008, x). The eight limbs are comprised of *yamas*, which involve morality and abstinence from outward actions, and
niyama, the practice of personal observances (Chapple 2008, 90). Next are āsanas or body postures; prānayāma or breathing exercises; and prayāhāra, the control or withdrawal from the senses (Chapple 2008, 90). Following these are dhāraṇā, which signifies a state of concertation and inner awareness; dhyāna or meditation and devotion; and lastly, samādhi, or the union with the divine or a state of complete liberation (Chapple 2008, 104).

Within Patañjali’s Yogaśāstra, there are several passages that can be interpreted to emphasize an inner peace as a state of calmness and joy within the self and also to relate it to outward expressions of peace through non-violence, harmony, and friendliness (e.g., Satchidananda 2012, 27; 123). The sūtras have been interpreted to demonstrate both a sense of connectedness to other beings and also what the effects of embodying peace can have on others through offering compassion for other individuals’ lived experiences (e.g., Satchidananda 2012, 3; 51). For example, within the first component, yamas, which are a set of five ethical rules of moral imperatives, is the concept of ahimsā. The concept of ahimsā is a peace-oriented component at the very foundation of yoga, signifying non-violence. Ahimsā as non-violence is defined by avoiding any harm to other living beings and an offering of respect and protection to all life forms (Chapple 2008, 44).

Mohandas Gandhi (commonly known by the name ‘Mahatma’), famously transformed the ancient teachings of yoga into active peacebuilding by engaging the personal virtue of ahimsā in a public campaign for social action and a call for empathy as leader of India’s independence movement that championed non-violent protest, later inspiring activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela (Howard 2013, 61). Gandhi’s campaign to free India from colonial rule in the 1940s intricately integrated the doctrine of ahimsā, and his campaign was based on the principle that people need to first examine themselves before assisting others (Chapple 2008, 46-47). In this sense, peace was interpreted by Gandhi as both a personal virtue encompassing the qualities of love, compassion, and forgiveness and a tool for meaningful social and political activism (Howard 2013, 60).

Considering the principle of ahimsā in the context of peacebuilding, non-violent action has been an effective way to reach negotiations and lay necessary groundwork for reconciliation (King 2007, 12). Gandhi’s work addressed forms of structural violence
including colonialism—the “power of the powerless,” as he described it and he saw non-violence as a truth-creating process (King 2002, 11). Truth was not simply used in a conventional sense, but in reference to a truth of human unity and connection (King 2002, 11-12). Gandhi also closely followed the Bhagavad Gītā, a Hindu scripture and spiritual text in which yoga is discussed as a path to liberation, in addition to Patañjali’s Yogaśāstra. He was deeply influenced by the ideologies detailed within the Bhagavad Gītā, which included the principles of Karma Yoga (the path of action).

Amy Champ compellingly explains that self-awareness and the desire for positive social action influences many yoga practitioners’ service-oriented approach to life, and that the “transcendence of social situations through the self-reflexive process of both finding one’s dharma and doing Karma Yoga provides a mechanism for overcoming hegemonic political structures” (2013, 279). Thus conceptualized, the incorporation of the principles as well as the direct practice of Karma Yoga are relevant today and are integrated into some modern yoga practices. While the yoga that is most commonly practiced in a modern global north context is āsana-based and has been largely integrated into physical fitness culture, many yoga practices can incorporate some of the other elements of Patañjali’s yoga through breath work, meditation, and contemplative practices (see Jain 2014). Furthermore, yoga teachers in various contexts may incorporate some of the moral ideas that surround the practice, such as peacefulness, non-judgment, and non-violence into their classes and yoga spaces.

Karma Yoga manifests itself within the scope of modern yoga in the form of free or donation-based classes and can take on other forms of volunteering in yoga milieus. In addition to the path of action, the Bhagavad Gītā describes Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion) and Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge). Together, the three practices, Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana, constitute the paths to realization (Beckerlegge 2014, 343; Flood 1996, 96; Jain 2014, 12). Gandhi applied the Bhagavad Gītā’s ‘in action’ philosophy in his own peace work and, as a result of his activism, is himself thus frequently referred to as an example of a Karma-Yogi (Howard 2013, 5; 42). These principles of yoga (Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana) are also integrated into the Satyananda Yoga tradition developed by Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga n.d.). The fusion of these principles allows...
the balance of the body and mind—integrating knowledge, emotion and service holistically, with an emphasis on awareness of the self and learning about oneself with yoga as a vehicle for doing so (Bihar Yoga School n.d.). Satyananda yoga facilitates this through an integrative practice involving postures, pranayama (breathing), the balancing of the body’s energy and meditation to calm the mind (Bihar School of Yoga n.d.). The Satyananda yogic tradition in particular will be highlighted throughout this work because of its influence on Dunna’s yoga-focused peacebuilding work. As such, many of the practitioners and yoga students interviewed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation will practice yoga from the Satyananda tradition.

These key texts, concepts and yogic traditions have been used to root yoga historically in social justice activism and peacebuilding. They demonstrate how yoga as an individualized practice (one that is used to enhance one’s own body, mind, and spirit) is not necessarily removed from the possibilities of collective action and peacework. Based on an understanding of how peace or a lack of peace manifests within an individual, this has effects on the social and political worlds of that person whether intended or not. Furthermore, yoga has been historically—and, in many cases, still is—intimately attached to concepts of service, compassion, and forgiveness. Yoga is a practice or action done personally or in a collective space, but also can be a philosophy of non-violence and peace with far-reaching social implications.

3.2 Yoga and modern-day popular culture

Mainstream yoga practices, or ‘yoga culture,’ has assumed a particular role in modern life, particularly in certain regions of the world that are fueled by yoga’s rise to prominence within celebrity culture and the accompanying demand for clothing and products. Such a demand has helped create a burgeoning yoga industry and opportunities for corporate capitalization on current trends. This is unsurprising, given that yoga is commonly sold and paid for by consumers and has the potential for various gear and apparel like other sports and leisure activities. With yoga rising in popularity, a wide-ranging number of clothing and sports companies are introducing their own yoga products such as mats, leggings, and accessories. In 2016, for instance, the United States alone had 36.7 million practitioners of
yoga and the accumulative spending on yoga classes, gear, and accessories amounted to roughly 16 billion dollars (Macy 2016).

Given the transferability of yoga to different groups of people, the market potential (like most industries) is vast, attracting a wide range of age demographics and interests from high fitness and elite training options to restorative gentle classes. Entertainment-based and creative options such as beer yoga\(^1\) or yoga involving animals such as goats,\(^2\) puppies, or cats are also on the rise and growing in popularity across the globe. Scholar Andrea Jain explains that during the second half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, yoga became branded like any other product or service, adding another component to the existing consumer-driven nature of modern society (2014, 77). She explains that by mythologizing yoga through consumer products and services, yoga becomes positioned in the consumer’s mind and meaning making begins to happen with the most common narrative being that of personal development and self-betterment (Jain 2014, 77). Yet, even with widespread population and adoption into the mainstream, modern yoga is frequently critiqued for its gatekeeping of certain bodies. The inclusion and exclusion of certain people in yoga spaces (due, for example, to the whiteness of modern yoga culture, high participation fees, gentrification or limiting body image ideals) raise alarm about the accessibility and impact of the practice—a possible barrier to the technique being impactful as a peacebuilding tool.

Chelsea Jackson Roberts explains that within yoga spaces “exclusion creates realities where liberatory thought and practice are policed, culturally relevant images of a yogi looks like are rare and the ability for yoga to move Western culture beyond its short-sighted capitalist machinations is stifled” (2016, 13). The consequences of exclusionary practices within yoga communities based on race, culture, ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality and gender identity are vast and can maintain the status quo of the capitalist, white-supremist patriarchy. Yet many have been involved in clapping back at this trend, seeking to create

\(^1\) Beer yoga is commonly hosted at breweries or bars and involves drinking beer during, before, or after yoga practice. Some are critical of the practice, saying that it takes away from the core tenants of yoga by its casual nature and involvement of alcohol (Verma 2017), while others attest to the community-building potential and relaxed nature this unconventional practice offers (Steeves 2018).

\(^2\) Yoga involving animals is a trend that has been on the rise. For example, at the time of writing a goat farm in Oregon had waitlist of 2,300 persons (Wells 2018).
authentic spaces of healing, connection and meaning, offering yoga as a tool for individual and collective liberation with counter-hegemonic potentials (see for examples, Roberts 2016; Haddix 2016; Ford 2016; and Ballard and Kripalani 2016). The pages that follow will explore in more detail these problematic dimensions of modern yoga, culminating with examples that go against the grain and offer yoga as a tool for advancing non-violence, peace work and conflict transformation.

3.2.1 Yoga and neoliberal ideals of self-betterment

The present landscape of modern yoga is often critiqued for its attachment to neoliberal concepts of personal development and self-betterment, where consumers buy yoga products and consume yoga’s messaging in pursuit of their own well-being, health, and wellness goals. Neoliberalism can be described as “a means of identifying a seemingly ubiquitous set of market-oriented policies as being largely responsible for a wide range of social, political, ecological and economic problems” (Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy 2017, 2). These policies and systems individualize responsibility and take it away from the state in all areas affecting a person’s life, in turn setting the stage for capitalist frameworks to take precedence (Springer et al. 2017).

The term has largely been introduced and understood through the work of philosopher Michel Foucault and his critiques on government; specifically, the ways that political power is exercised in all aspects of human life. Foucault speaks to this reality through his discussions of governmentality, which can be described as the ways people are governed not solely by government structures but by systems of power, albeit religious, medical, philosophical, and so on (Lemke 2002, 50). In Foucault’s conceptualization of neoliberal governmentality then, governance and responsibility are increasingly individualized (Foucault 1997, 67-71). In this context, people are individually responsible for aspects of their daily life that would have previously been the responsibility of the state or government, such as their own health (Wakefield and Fleming 2009). This detracts from structural and institutional issues such as access to affordable and equitable healthcare or a liveable wage that contribute to health ailments in the first place. Instead, a dominant rhetoric shifts to the individual who should self-monitor and self-regulate to attain health
and acceptability in society, while navigating impossible parameters to obtain these goals. In this neoliberal climate the worth of an individual is measured in one-dimensional and economic terms, with yoga being one of the outlets through which these values are exercised. This creates the contradiction and divide between what much of modern yoga culture perpetuates from an understanding of yoga as an embodied spiritual practice that “that serves as an antidote to the cynical, sedentary, and often opulent lifestyle that has developed in the postmodern world” (Chapple 2008, 2). This tension is at the core of critical and feminist critiques of yoga and pose barriers to yoga’s peacebuilding and counter-hegemonic potential.

As such, yoga advertising and imagery risks coopting notions of inner peace and calls on a largely female audience to find peace for themselves through the practice of yoga. The yoga industry is intricately connected to the neoliberal concept of self-improvement, where predominantly women (estimated to be 85%) consume from within the yoga industry in pursuit of the concepts it sells related to health, wellness, inner peace, self-acceptance, and self-actualization (Kauer 2016, 91). A neoliberal rhetoric of self-care, as well as the personal emphasis on achieving of inner peace, individualizes personal responsibilities for one’s health (including mental health) and the associated moral outlook and conduct of peaceful subjects. Though government campaigns and medical professionals widely advocate for the importance of physical activity in the remedy and prevention of many health conditions, the costs associated (e.g., equipment, personal training, gym memberships, and so on) are an individual’s responsibility (Markula 2014, 146).

Neoliberalism shapes, in particular, women’s embodiment of their identities and can be negligent of structural violences and barriers to wellbeing. The mainstream yoga industry relies on the commodification of the ideal body, not unlike other fitness and wellness industries, individualizing and blaming one’s lack of health or fitness on the individual’s inability to obtain it (Kauer 2016). Kauer explains that “such models of wellness and health reproduce classed, raced, gendered and sexed bodies that serve the consumer capitalist marketplace (e.g., the weight loss industry, fitness industry, cosmetic surgery, pharmaceuticals, and so on) while simultaneously pathologizing and demonizing transgressive corporeality (e.g., queer, fat bodies)” (2016, 91). This reality can fuel a
reliance on answers and resources within a limiting capitalist frame that can perpetuate a set of values that run counter to several foundational ideas of yoga philosophy and, ultimately, can contradict some of the core aims of the practice. In some respects, yoga is presented as a remedy to the hectic, stress-driven capitalist framework; in other ways, yoga perpetuates it.

3.3 Yoga, consumerism and social justice

Yoga and particular characteristics that are associated with a yoga lifestyle, such as altruism, social justice, and/or achieving peace, make the case that yoga may be different from conventional analyses of fitness spaces, the wellness industry and neoliberalism. The intersections, then, of yoga, social justice and consumerism, I argue are unique and are particularly relevant when considering yoga as a vehicle of peacebuilding or social justice.

More broadly, the infiltration of consumer products into the sphere of social justice and peacebuilding is well documented. Increasingly, not-for-profit organizations and social causes working towards goals of peace offer their ‘brand’ for sale through merchandise, while profit-based companies enhance marketing efforts to demonstrate their ‘socially conscious’ business approaches. Such marketing campaigns are heavily associated with—and in part successful because of—consumerist values. This reality is emblematic of the on-going critiques of social justice activism that raises awareness through commodities that are branded and worn by consumers. These types of ‘charitable’ acts are particularly problematic when recipients of ‘your help’ can be situated as recipients of aid, rather than as agents in their own lives. For example, harmful stereotypes can be produced in global activism when it is framed as consumers helping or saving those in some countries of the global south (King 2014, 473-492). Further, the mix of social justice and neoliberalism can

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3 For example, Product (RED)’s consumer-driven fundraising approach relies on the participation of well-known brands. Apple and Gap Inc sell special, red-branded products to signal their demonstration of giving back, which is oriented to private-sector support for HIV/AIDS work in African nations ((RED) 2017). Another notable example is the popular Tom’s franchise and the various products that they sell on a one-for-one basis, donating, for example, a pair of shoes to someone in need in the global south when a new pair is purchased in the global north (Toms Shoes n.d.).
also foster a superficial sense of ‘harmony’ that is ignorant of global inequalities and colonial histories. What is at times wilful ignorance risks reproducing harmful and othering narratives. Furthermore, such marketing efforts do not convey the whole of global dynamics that leave some in factories creating products and others with the agency to participate in ‘activism’ by purchasing them (Bair 2010, 203-226). Even with good intentions at their heart, on the part of companies and consumers, relationships to global capitalist ventures are often not in the best interest of people’s rights or liberation, given how capitalist consumerism is in part fueled by patriarchal and other oppressive entities (Mohanty 2003, 34).

As such, it is critical not only to consider the influence of neoliberalism in our critiques of corporations and institutions, but also to address neoliberalist tendencies within our social movements and activism, as well (Mohanty 2003, 53). In particular, there is a need to “refashion contemporary humanitarianism as an empathetic gesture of commoditized concern,” as evidenced in the way social justice messaging is increasingly coopted and depoliticized into easily consumable messages and products overshadows structural issues contributing to violence (Mostafanezhad 2014, 112). This over-simplification of key messages can also delegitimize other forms of activism that require commitment, education, and concerted attention beyond the instant gratification of buying in the name of good. These dynamics risks naturalizing inequalities and oversimplifying complex social justice concerns (Gurd 2006, 24).

This conversation translates to the ever-evolving yoga industry where consumerism and altruistic values frequently meet. Given yoga’s close relationship with social justice efforts (both historically and presently) and the contemporary trend of yoga teachers and studios integrating a charitable component into their work, this conversation is a point of relevant inquiry in the field of critical yoga studies. For example, there are countless models where mainstream yoga retail companies contribute charitably to various causes by donating proceeds of sales or donating products to community events. For example, the company YOGAaccessories plants a tree for every online order they receive and donates a percentage of their profits to breast cancer research (YOGAaccessories n.d.). This trend can be seen in the many studios around the globe that donate to community partners, global
charities, or offer classes where funds are donated. It is also important to note that such classes are often less expensive than a typical class, which can promote accessibility for the community and offer social justice responses to normative capitalist trends on local and global levels. Most yoga studios and companies are for-profit and support employees’ livelihoods and can generate positive spaces in communities. In many respects, this is welcomed within the industry, and companies of all sectors should be urged to be more socially conscious. What becomes problematic, however, is the underlying narrative of ‘buy something, help someone’ that often contributes only a small percentage of funds to the cause itself, under the guise of social justice, and may contribute very little to change or challenge oppressive structures.

There is a range of rapidly evolving yoga-related products and trends, not the least of which is the shift away from the basic prerequisites of a mat and comfortable clothing; indeed, the practice today requires more. For example, there is a rising trend of monthly subscription boxes in North America, which has also become popular within the yoga industry. This is a trend that allows the consumer to receive several products at a discounted bundled price. The consumer, however, is often not able to choose exactly what is in these subscription boxes, leading to the accumulation of products that they may neither want nor need. For example, the company, BuddhiBox advertises that consumers “subscribe and live mindfully” to receive a mix of ‘cruelty-free’ fitness, lifestyle, and skincare products (such as yoga socks; a ‘peaceful warrior’ makeup tote; or healing crystals). In addition, a portion of the cost is donated to a different charity each month (BuddhiBox n.d.). Similarly, one can order a box from the company Yogi Surprise and receive a “purposefully curated collection of yoga-inspired items every month,” which allows the purchaser to “connect to a global community, enrich [their] yoga journey and love [themselves]” (Yogi Surprise n.d.). The products themselves carry a social-justice message in that several are fair trade and organic (as well as vegan or vegetarian friendly) and arrive in a box made of fully recyclable material (Yogi Surprise n.d.).

The social justice or charitable angle being used within the yoga industry is common, widespread and oftentimes expected. In part, this is due to the sheer rise in popularity of yoga that has made it a desirable commodity opportunity for corporations from various
sectors. Yoga is utilized by multinational corporations often to perpetuate the status quo (that is, slim, white, often female bodies) rather than acting as a counter to patriarchal consumer capitalist outputs (Blaine 2016, 132). Some scholars would also argue that the spiritual components of the practices and other aspects beyond the image-based āsanas are either dropped entirely from the mainstream advertising narrative or coopted as a means of self-transformation, adding to a neoliberal ideal of subjecthood. In this sense, yoga connects the religio-philosophical aspect of yoga to the dominant consumer culture, telling buyers that the attainment of beauty and health ideals through yoga are part of this broader religious and philosophical aspect of yoga, which liberates yogis in their process of self-discovery and personal development (Jain 2014, x). Beyond what is happening at the level of the individual and the harmful effects of such trends on wellbeing and inner peace, it is critical to inquire into how the potential within yoga communities for effective social transformation is being compromised and depoliticized by consumerism. Neoliberalism is at the core of this system where desirable, ‘good citizens’ (i.e., good North American, Unites States citizens, Canadians, and so on), are philanthropic and helping women elsewhere under the guise that all is well at home, further depoliticizing key concerns, both within Canadian society and globally.

3.3.1 Case study: Yoga Journal

Examining the covers of the popular yoga magazine, Yoga Journal, offers insight into the complex dynamics described above relating to consumerism and the neoliberal yogi. The magazine itself functions as a commodity to be sold, and features advertisements of various products that are assumed to be of interest to the yogi consumer. As one brief example to demonstrate the significance of advertisements in the magazine, one particular issue (Volume 297, released in December 2017) had thirty-nine advertisements in total among its ninety-two pages (some being smaller banner advertisements and others full-page spreads) (Yoga Journal 2017, December). Yoga Journal is only one such magazine catering to the yoga lifestyle that sells particular images, ideals, and lifestyles to its readers that offer insights into the broader yoga industry’s messages and narratives. For example, the magazine cover models are predominantly female, white, and slim (though there has been a push to diversity this in recent years). The messages across the covers are fairly uniform,
with varying subthemes and topics, but all relate to the narrative of being one’s best self, a key component of neoliberal capitalism.

Looking at the covers alone of the 2016 12-month subscription, there are countless messages pertaining to ‘inner peace’ and an individualizing of peace, wellness, and happiness. From a brief qualitative content analysis of the 2016 covers from January-December, I argue that popular yoga advertising can coopt and utilize powerful imagery related to peacebuilding as a means to sell products and a yoga lifestyle. *Yoga Journal* calls on its largely female audience to ‘find calm,’ (*Yoga Journal* 2017, December) and ‘find balance,’ (*Yoga Journal* 2016, November) through the practice of yoga. Something I found particularly noteworthy was the framing of the readers’ responsibility for their own well-being in this pursuit of peace, which maps on to earlier arguments about the relationship of yoga and neoliberalism. For example, the February 2016 issue reads, “Back pain, headaches, can’t sleep? 13 ways to feel better now,” while March 2016 offers suggestions on the importance of quieting your mind to become strong and calm (*Yoga Journal* 2016, February; March). Readers are told to “lift your mood” with “practices to calm your mind” as the agents of change in their own realities (*Yoga Journal* 2016, May). The narrative of achieving inner peace as a means of health and wellness can also be found in the June 2016 volume that invites readers to “find true joy” through “poses for happiness, health and abundance;” and offers a meditation for a “peaceful mind;” which invites the reader to “inspire a happy life;” and “find instant energy” (*Yoga Journal*). The cover features a blonde, white model in a peaceful ‘tree’ pose against a serene ocean background (*Yoga Journal* 2016, June). Her pose is effortless, her skin is glowing, and her hair placed to perfection. She embodies the messages on the cover: emulating the peace, happiness, and vibrant energy described. The remaining covers for 2016 told a similar narrative of how to be “happy inside;” how to stay calm; to find “peace inside” through “meditations to soothe your spirit;” and “balance your body and mind” (*Yoga Journal* 2016, December; October; September).

Pirkko Markula conducted a thorough Foucauldian discourse analysis in 2014 on *Yoga Journal* covers, which found parallel results and themes with covers of the magazine focusing in particular on happiness, not only in terms of the yoga ideal bodily aesthetic
(where one looks good then feels good), but also in achieving a personal happiness and freedom that allows the yogi to find her true self (Markula 2014, 160). As such, “the search for the true self also indicated a shift toward an autonomous neoliberal individual who engaged in voluntary self-regulation to maximize her quality of life through an artful assembly of a specific lifestyle” (Markula 2014, 160). A dominant narrative here is one of responsibilization (Yoga Journal 2016). In the context of neoliberal governmentality, subjects are governed in a way that individualizes their responsibility for aspects of their life, and a primary means of easily obtaining the necessary tools in self-improvement is through capital consumption (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 849).

Within the yoga industry, this is achieved through paying for yoga or buying yoga lifestyle products or studio passes. These narratives frame the individual as responsible for and with the freedom to choose the necessary steps to ‘achieve’ this state of peaceful being, whether self-care, a more rigorous yoga practice, or the purchase of tools to aid in these pursuits. This is a symptom of modern neoliberal societies and is closely linked to trends in consumption that further frame the individual as having power and agency, which, in turn, deflects responsibility from governments, societies, and communities on a broader level. Markula found that Yoga Journal goes beyond typical neoliberal fitness as holistic health and self-worth rhetoric which requires an individualization of responsibility, achieved through self-surveillance, discipline, and consumption, as it includes a rhetoric of social responsibility, awareness, and mindfulness or ‘conscious’ living (2014, 165-66). However, when this ‘social awareness’ is inextricably linked with a form of self and community care founded on values such as self-surveillance, discipline and consumption of lifestyle goods it limits the scope of yoga’s transformative abilities to that of a regulatory and depoliticized practice, devoid of fuel for social and institutional change (Markula 2014, 166).

Webb et al. conducted a longitudinal analysis of mainstream yoga magazines (Webb, Vinoski, Warren-Findlow, Padro, Burns, and Sudreth 2017a)—with a focus on Yoga Journal magazine (Webb, Vinoski, Warren-Findlow, Burrell, and Putz 2017b)—and examined cover content, trends, and advertisement themes over a 40-year period, looking at the advertising representation of socio-demographics and appearance-related attributes (2017a). This analysis of thematic content and models’ appearance-related attributes in
advertisements spanning four decades of Yoga Journal point to some insightful, yet perhaps unsurprising trends within the yoga industry, such as a homogenous representation of female bodies with little diversity in terms of race, gender expression, body image and body variety over the years and little to differentiate from these magazines and those of the mainstream beauty industry. Ford echoes this, pointing out that there were only 18 racialized bodies represented on the cover of the magazine over the period of a decade, from 2006-2015 (2016, 35).

The researchers caution that the messages of the Yoga Journal magazines and other yoga-focused magazines, promote an ‘ideal’ yet unrealistic and homogenous ‘yoga body’ (Vinoski, Webb, Warren-Findlow, Brewer, and Kiffmeyer 2017, 1). Further, models are most frequently white and in their 20s and 30s in the more recent years of the publication, with trends in models’ appearances matching those of the culturally dominant body ideals over time (Vinoski et al. 2017, 1). In relation to discussions around body image on yoga magazine covers, the authors warn that the display of cover image models with “ideal bodies” alongside “holistic health caption themes” conveys the message that the thin yoga body is synonymous with a healthy body (Webb et al. 2017a, 94). They also note a stark increase in advertisements in recent years of the publication, specifically pertaining to the sale of food, nutritional supplements and apparel (Vinoski et al. 2017, 2). The researchers attest that “consumerist ideology attempts to conflate notions of personal empowerment and choice in practicing health-enhancing self-care with the need to purchase certain products or experiences in order to embody a healthful appearance” (Webb et al. 2017a, 95).

Images within the yoga industry’s main outlets of advertisement and popular culture representation remain analogous to that of the mainstream celebrity and beauty industry, and are closely correlated with a false sense of empowerment where consumers can effectively buy societal ideals. This reality posits a missed opportunity to critically challenge dominant representations and instead focus on yoga as a space of social justice. The responsibilization of health, wellbeing, and inner peace, for women in particular, is a worrying narrative that acts as a form of self-governance and management towards the goals of self-improvement—a process that is seemingly never-ending as there is always a
new trend or product to keep it running. Against this backdrop, wellness and wellbeing are “seen as the result of good choices made by morally autonomous and efficacious citizens and are the central site of moral transformation and civic participation” (Lavrence and Lozanski 2014, 80).

Markus Giesler and Ela Veresiu argue that responsiblization can be understood as a shift in responsibility away from states and corporations, to the consumer. This is conceptualized in four categories: personalization, authorization, capabilization, and transformation (2014, 841). First, ‘personalization’ frames the individual as a responsible and moral consumer, in contrast to the immoral other or irresponsible consumer (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 841). This brings social problems to an individual level and frames them as such. Second, ‘authorization’ draws on expert knowledge to confirm the status quo and associated consumer choices (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 841). For example, the wellness and healthism justification of yoga continues to grow and strengthens the reach of the consumer yoga industry. Third, ‘capabilization’ creates this market of products and services for the consumer to ‘ethically’ self-manage their life and, in the final stage of transformation, the “individual consumers adopt their new moralized self-understanding” (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 841). This framing creates a scenario where consumers are reconstructed as free, autonomous, rational, and entrepreneurial subjects who draw on individual market choices to invest in their own human capital, such that the need for top-down intervention into the market is rendered obsolete (Giesler and Veresiu 2014, 842).

Consumers, then, in the phase of transformation as outlined by Giesler and Veresiu (2014, 841), feel empowered in their own lives and consumer choices under a guise of neoliberalism and “adopt their new moralized self-understanding”. The centering of the individual, rather than a sense of state/government responsibility or a sense of community/collective responsibility, is problematic when understanding peace as an individual achievement and something to be individually attained. Individualizing a responsibility for peace can deflect from community driven peace and social justice initiatives. In this case, ‘easy’ and consumer driven efforts, rather than anything revolutionary, weaken yoga’s potential as a tool for social justice.
3.3.2 Case study: Lululemon

Many yoga retail companies also embody the complex intersections of consumerism, ideals of peace, and yoga lifestyle culture more broadly. One of the more famous and perhaps more popular examples is the formerly Canadian retail company Lululemon. In addition to selling yoga athletic apparel, the company hosts community events, often for free, and partners with several NGOs such as Yoga Foster, LoveYourBrain, and the African Yoga Project for their social impact program, “Here to Be” (Lululemon n.d.a). This program is a community-based initiative “that makes the healing benefits of yoga and meditation accessible through best-in-class non-profit partnerships” (Lululemon n.d.a). Their website explains that Lululemon sees the potential of yoga service programs that focus on community and the importance of making yoga as a resource accessible to everyone, including those with injury and illness or recovering from trauma, violence, and conflict (Lululemon n.d.a). Lululemon’s website also states that the company provides grants to local organizations through a “global network of stores” with a focus on “creating a community of practice with [their] network of partners so that yogis and practitioners can share resources, trainings and best practices to realize [their] collective impact” (Lululemon n.d.a). In other words, the company argues that supporting Lululemon as a company through product consumption congruently means supporting these causes and organizations that are doing more critical work with yoga as a tool for social justice or rehabilitative therapy. Purchasing products from companies with a social justice angle in some respects is enticing and arguably companies should be using their wealth and power to give back to their communities. A closer look at the marketing and messaging behind these narratives tells us a great deal about our contemporary society, its neoliberal subjects and what peace in this context looks like.

A 2017 global marketing campaign by Lululemon portrayed a variety of artists and athletes in contexts outside of our conventional idea of what yoga is. In the campaign, each person is featured doing their own individual craft such as drawing, music, dancing, or martial arts—all while reflecting on a specific theme including trust, non-violence, self-discipline, meditation, breath, self-discovery, and letting go. The campaign featured short campaign videos (released in May 2017) which Lululemon described as a way to honour “yoga in all
its forms by taking practice off the mat,” advocating that, “practice in action leads to a purposeful life” (Lululemon n.d.b). For example, the UK-based rapper P Money reflects on the practice of breath, and C. J. Hendry, a hyperrealistic artist, reflects on drawing as a form of meditation. On the theme of non-violence, Jian Pablico—described as an entrepreneur and youth community builder from Vancouver—performs capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial arts practice. In the video, Pablico describes that, “violence is a reality. You have to know how to handle it,” stating that the personal choices we have in life such as choosing not to jump to an aggressive part of ourselves without stopping to reflect for a moment and take a breath (Lululemon n.d.c).

In many ways, the video series conveys a message that yoga has the potential to go beyond the physical, postural elements of yoga (or āsanas) and, instead, be a way of life. The practice thus expands beyond physical benefits to the self or to the body and has broader implications for the individual practicing and their communities, for example by depicting listening to music or engaging in meditation as yoga. as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Patañjali’s Yogaśāstra, offer āsanas as one of eight limbs or components of a broader model of what yoga is. The series is also international in its representation as a global north output and depicts non-normative yoga bodies that are diverse by race, gender, and physique. The video simultaneously pushes boundaries on what yoga is and is juxtaposed with the reality that this is a corporation with global revenue of approximately USD $2.34 billion in 2016 alone (Statistia n.d.). The videos exist as both a marketing campaign selling consumer goods and a yoga lifestyle and as contributions to the diversification of who yogis are and what yoga itself can mean. Lululemon does this creatively selling what yoga is and how that lifestyle can be achieved through its products, with slim to no portrayals of ‘yoga’ as we understand it in the global north mainstream.

Many would argue that as progressive as the company may strive to be in their social justice stances, that their values remain consistent with those of other capitalist ventures as a central aim, over elements displayed about such as contributing diverse ideas of yoga to the mainstream or having yoga be engaged as a social justice project in under resourced communities. The issues here are multifaceted and include arguments such as the perpetuation of a fast fashion mentality of overconsumption and mindless purchasing, as
well as possible negative impacts of this overabundance of synthetic, easily replaceable items that crowd landfills and pollute waterways (Vermarie, Pomeroy, Herczegh, Haggart, and Murphy 2017). Further, several issues around body representation and the exclusion of certain bodies from the brand have been widely noted, with employees reportedly coming forth saying that shunning plus-sized bodies has been a part of the company's strategy and the company's founder Chip Wilson has also been quoted as saying that Lululemon clothes are not made for all bodies (Huffington Post 2013). There have been concerns about Lululemon’s low wages for retail store workers, as well as discrimination and abuse experienced by workers in some of their factories, such as Reliable Source Industrial (Cambodia) Co, Ltd. in Cambodia and Textiles Opico in El Salvador and Youngone Corporation in Bangladesh as recent as 2019 (Project Just n.d.; Donaldson n.d.; Marsh and Ahmed 2019). Moreover, most recently, Lululemon has been under criticism in the media for promoting an event on how to “resist capitalism,” with many calling out the hypocrisy of a company that purports its followers should both reject capitalism as a lifestyle, while also consuming their yoga gear as part of this identity (BBC News 2020).

These tensions beg the question of what it means to navigate the yoga industry and its deep ties both to values of peace and to capitalist pursuits. How can yoga be engaged as a platform for social justice and peacework when peace is perceivably achievable and available for purchase. More concerning still, are the ways in which we address a framework where social justice is so closely linked to consumption as not only having great market value but framed as a personal responsibility to attain through yoga practice? How does this framing detract from the collective, from community, in building more peaceful societies?

Lululemon has become an “international retail phenomenon” and has done so by “promoting an ethic of self-betterment through exercise, positive thinking and clothes” (Nelson 2011). Christine Lavrence and Kristin Lozanski explain that in the case of Lululemon, “neoliberalism conflates ‘individualism and liberation,’ along with ‘consumption and activism’ through its consumer driven logic” with participation yielding “the opportunity to mark oneself as a good citizen subject through appropriate consumption” (2014, 79). Within this frame, consumers buy narratives of peace and
happiness through products with a social justice brand, but little social justice themselves, exemplifying “how the quests for self-fulfillment and consumption are mutually reinforcing” (Lavrence and Lozanski 2014, 91). This illustrates “how discourses of choice and self-care reiterate the responsibilized self that is at the core of contemporary neoliberal societies’ appropriate health management and the consumption of wellness lifestyles are ways in which citizens both abate and ultimately reinforce” (Lavrence and Lozanski 2014, 91). Consumers are told that they are responsible for their own peace and personal development and that this can be achieved through a series of steps, including buying into the yoga lifestyle.

Ariane Balizet and Whitney Meyers explain how much of Lululemon’s marketing and key messaging, such as their many slogans found on their shopping bags, that say things like: “the conscious brain can only hold one thought at a time. Choose a positive thought” or “mediocrity is as close to the bottom as it is to the top and will give you a lousy life” (2016, 283). These manifestos and their messaging relate to what Balizet and Meyers call emotional neoliberalism where negative thoughts and difficult life circumstances are to be transcended by the individual, through working on oneself and having ambition (2016, 283). This limiting conceptualization negates the very real barriers individuals face in life such as homophobia, racism, disability/health-based discrimination, sexism and poverty (Balizet and Meyers 2016, 283). By rooting success (or peace, or worth, and so on) in the “physical and mental discipline of the individual, post-feminist portrayals of yoga invalidate the premises of intersectional feminism as well as its aims of increasing visibility of identity categories and working against systemic forms of social injustice?” (Balizet and Meyers 2016, 284).

There are strong links between the yoga industry’s capitalist ties and its guise as an instrument of social justice that arguably detract from yoga’s potential as an outlet for peacebuilding and social justice. Individualizing one’s responsibility for peace and treating it as a commodity detracts from the potential for yoga to produce community-driven social justice; it also risks tokenizing yoga’s potential as a tool for peacebuilding, becoming instrumentalized within—rather than disrupting—a neoliberal framework of governance. This argument is not to say that yoga efforts in the global north have tainted or distorted
traditional and ‘pure’ forms of yoga, as these essentializing tropes can also be harmful and misrepresentative, as well (Godrej 2017, 773). As such, the representations of yoga in the media and by corporations like Lululemon, risk detracting from social justice, hindering and complicating yoga’s potential as a tool for meaningful social change on structural levels (Balizet and Meyers 2016, 284).

3.4 Counter-hegemonic responses: Yoga for peace and social justice

As yoga becomes increasingly saturated with corporate and neoliberal values, it can be difficult to conceptualize counterhegemonic understandings of yoga as a tool in feminist, social justice or peacebuilding work. Yet, as a transrational understanding of peace work would confer, multiple realities and experiences can and do co-exist. While holding space for contradictions and complexities, the possibilities of yoga are as diverse as the multiple ways yoga is taken up and utilized by individuals, and communities. As an ever evolving, transforming, and globalizing tradition, yoga is inevitably shaped and molded by all those who interact with the practice. As such, if yoga can be branded and adorned as an object, ideal or lifestyle, can it too, be grassroots, radical and transformative in nature?

In the following pages, I argue that some engagements with yoga can be revolutionary work, challenging the limitations of individualized internalizations of yoga as neoliberal self-improvement. Though discourses within the consumer-based yoga industry risk coopting social justice narratives and may detract from peace efforts; on the periphery, counter-hegemonic uses of yoga as a tool to disrupt and evoke social change are happening. There are examples of yoga that push back against dominant political, social, and economic ideologies. There are examples of yoga being utilized as a tool for social justice, as a method of peacebuilding, and as a site of critical inquiry at the intersections of class, race, gender, and disability. These experiences too, are shaping what yoga is and what it can mean to individuals and societies.
3.4.1 Critical yoga studies and praxis

Academically, yoga has become institutionalized as an area of study, worthy of discovery beyond its religious studies roots, in which students engage with critical methodologies and creative applications of the practice. Moreover, the study of yoga is growing to include critical perspectives that incorporate cultural, social, and political critiques and questions. Anjali Vats explains that “yoga is a cultural practice through which the meanings of bodies are articulated with respect to race, (neo)coloniality, gender, sexuality, disability, and class, among other categories of difference” (2016, 330). As an emerging discipline, critical yoga studies provides a space for scholars and practitioners to respond to and in some cases speak back to realities of modern yoga such as cultural appropriation, racism, class barriers, sexual harassment/assault and ableism within modern yoga culture (2016, 330). The growing field is highly interdisciplinary in nature. For example, yoga has also been examined within the philosophical study of phenomenology (Morley 2001), on various topics such as the aging body (Humberstone and Cutler-Riddick 2015), injury, illness (Myers 2015), and body image (Moorman 2013)—connecting to the notion of lived-experience. Other critical literature is emerging from various disciplines on topics such as the need to push back against Western dominance in yoga, speaking to conversations around the commodification of yoga and questions of who owns yogic knowledge (Anjali 2016, 326). Anjali explains that critical yoga studies treats the practice of yoga as a “complex, globalizing phenomenon which constitutes and is constituted by myriad individuals, cultural practices, and institutional superstructures” and is both academic and praxis-based, with much of the academic literature speaking to and complementing the on-the-ground work of practitioners and activists within this field (2016, 30).

Central to this research, yoga has been emerging within the social science and humanities academic spaces as a phenomenon of mainstream western popular culture with counter-cultural roots (Jain 2013) and as a complex site of privilege in western settings (Bar 2013). With roots in India, yet also having a large transnational (Hauser 2013) and transcultural (Strauss 2005; Schwind 2015) reach, with various cultures consuming, practicing, and appreciating the practice, what we know of as yoga is constantly changing and being
challenged. The multifaceted contradictions of yoga as a commodity (Graham 2012) that simultaneously purports values of non-attachment (Burley 2014) have also been raised.

Most centrally, there has been a rise in yoga and yoga literature that pushes back against global north mainstream representations of yoga. Increasingly, there are yoga class offerings, workshops, social commentary, and emerging academic literature on the need for yoga to be more inclusive and to challenge culturally appropriative and harmful trends. For example, the academic journal Race and Yoga was launched at the University of California Berkeley in 2016 as the first scholarly journal to critically inquire into issues of inclusivity in yoga communities (University of California n.d.). The journal examines issues surrounding race, class, gender, sexuality, and sexualization within the yoga industry, covering themes such as decolonizing yoga, the appropriation of body-positivity, the yoga industrial complex, and experiences of women of colour in predominantly white, hegemonic yoga spaces. The journal features peer-reviewed academic pieces and also includes creative essays, which may challenge academic authority on what type of learning and what voices are to be considered ‘academic.’ Prior to founding the journal, which is an initiative of the Race and Yoga Working Group of The Center for Race and Gender at the UC Berkeley campus, a series of annual academic conferences were held on topics including, but not limited to, gentrification, yoga whitewashing, yoga tourism, the concept of ‘safe space’ in yoga, as well as the corporatization and commodification of the practice (Center for Race and Gender n.d.). Similarly, a critical anthology entitled, Yoga, The Body, and Embodied Social Change: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis, launched in 2016, showcases critical research and analysis on topics such as queering yoga, yoga as feminist praxis, yoga and disability, eating disorders, and neoliberalism (Berila, Klein, and Roberts 2016, v-vi). New programs such as a Master of Arts in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles (Loyola Marymount University n.d.) and a Master of Arts Program at the Centre of Yoga Studies at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS n.d.) have also recently been established and demonstrate the institutionalization and establishment of the study of yoga and of Critical Yoga Studies as a field of study worthy of academic inquiry.
Notable social justice examples of yoga as a site of inquiry are rising within mainstream public discourse. As one brief example, Canadian media in 2015 reported on the controversy and subsequent debates regarding the cancellation of the University of Ottawa’s free campus yoga classes that were being offered to students with disabilities due to claims of cultural appropriation (Duffy 2015; Moyer 2015; and Pells 2015). This resulted in widespread attention to the topic, with several commentators criticizing the appropriation argument because “yoga is for everyone” (Carson 2015; Dhillon 2015; Humphreys 2015; Soave 2015). Others in the debate advocated for yoga’s detachment from its cultural and religious roots, inviting mainstream debates on what yoga is and for whom it is intended. Furthermore, initiatives to address such issues within the yoga industry exist such as the online platform, Decolonizing Yoga, which began as a space of support and resources and has grown into a platform that highlights marginalized voices within yoga (Decolonizing Yoga 2018).

3.4.2 Yoga as protest

I have presented examples that complicate the use of yoga as social justice and as a tool for dealing with complex trauma. Although yoga can be used in cases of addressing community violence (for example see Catlett and Bunn 2016, 259) and experiences of sexual violence and other bodily traumas (Stevens and McLeod 2018; Crews, Stolz-Newton, and Grant 2016), yoga spaces can be spaces of trauma, sexual violence, and harassment. Yoga can be a safe space for growth and community as much as it can be a vulnerable one with complex power dynamics and abuses of this power. (For example, classes may unintentionally trigger difficult memories or yoga instructors may abuse their position of power and cross boundaries of students.)

Similarly, yoga continues to be something that is protested for its exclusionary and appropriative nature, while simultaneously manifesting as a form of peaceful protest. For example, in 2013, citizens in Turkey took part in a peaceful protest, featuring a yoga session, to save Istanbul’s Gezi Park from being turned into a shopping mall (Yackley 2013). In another example, the #HerVoice campaign led yoga as protest in London, England, to raise awareness about violence against women in India during a 2015 visit by
the country’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Sanghani n.d.). Yoga spaces have also become politicized, such as the Vancouver yoga studio, Ocean and Crow Yoga, which, in 2016, branded itself as a Trump-free zone, as a way for people to cope with the post-election discussion and to show support for organizations and people directly affected by political decision-making during that time frame (Baluja n.d.). In 2016, on the International Day of Yoga, residents of Noida, India, performed yoga in protest of a dumping site near communities, which affects their health and well-being (Sangomla 2016). And in June 2017, on the International Day of Yoga, members of 62 farmers’ unions blocked roads in New Delhi, India, in which members each held the yoga pose, savāsana, as a way to bring awareness to high rates in farmer suicide (Mohan 2017).

Most recently, there has been an outpouring of stories connected to the #MeToo movement relating to sexual assault and harassment within yoga spaces. Rachel Brathen, commonly known in the industry as YogaGirl, has written and compiled stories of women, many describing the same powerful yoga figures and ‘gurus’ within the industry who abuse their power and sexually assault largely female yoga students (Brathen 2018). Andrea Jain spoke to these issues in August 2018 at a public lecture at the Australian National University, entitled, “Heal the self, not the system: sexual violence in the global yoga industry,” where she argued that the various narratives of sexual violence in the yoga industry are connected to broader systemic violence, particularly “a globally pervasive neoliberal logic whereby control over one’s body is valued, but is defined as an individual achievement; and capitalist strategies of commodification that contain dissent against neoliberal individualism through gestural subversions” (Jain 2018).

3.4.3 Prison yoga

Programming that engages yoga for incarcerated persons has been implemented globally, in numerous countries such as South Africa (Walsh 2015), Canada (Gerster 2013), the United States (Pilon 2013), and Kenya (Kikeke 2013) by various incarceration facilities and non-profit organizations. Large-scale and intricately designed yoga programs for prisoners are gaining momentum, challenging ideas of healing, rehabilitation, and the
purpose of imprisonment (Prison Yoga Project 2016), while attempting to work on root causes of trauma on both individual and societal levels (Deville 2015).

Recently, incarcerated persons at the Yerawada Central Prison in Pune, India,\(^4\) were granted the potential of an early release conditional upon their successful completion of yoga training and an exam that can be seen as challenging conventional prison sentencing and rehabilitation options (Marszal 2015). In this prison facility and in others around the world, inmates are also receiving yoga teacher training (YTT), which may have interesting implications for inmates teaching other inmates and also opening up post-release employment, coping mechanisms for those trained, and potential pathways to ‘give back’ to society. The Prison Yoga Project, for example, is one organization that offers such training to inmates in the United States. This program has also added additional services that train local yoga teachers to become facilitators in prisons, create materials for government, NGOs, and the general public on the topic, as well as work with prison systems abroad in countries such as Norway, Belgium, Mexico, Guatemala, India, and the Netherlands (Prison Yoga Project 2018).

Under the direction of the Prison Yoga Project in 2016, a high-security prison in Maryland, United States, offered one of the first-ever YTT sessions for incarcerated persons at the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women (Downey 2016). All successful participants received a diploma, certifying them to teach yoga from the Yoga Center of Columbia. Some of the participants in this program focus on ameliorating their future lives and finding purpose upon release and, for others, and particularly those who will not be released in their lifetimes, the program focuses on the present moment and navigating one’s reality through the struggles of incarceration (Downey 2016). This yoga teacher training program is part of the prison’s broader mandate to offer the inmates some kind of certification, such as a college degree as a part of the goal of dropping the prison’s recidivism rates that have so far been successful in Maryland.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) Yerawada Central Prison is a high-security facility and one of the largest incarceration facilities in South Asia. Mohandas Gandhi was imprisoned there in 1932. The facility is known for its innovative rehabilitation and application of Gandhian concepts and teachings (Marszal 2015).

\(^5\) Maryland’s prison recidivism rate dropped from 47.8% in 2007 to 40.5% in 2012 (Downey 2016).
Yoga has been cited widely within academic scholarship as a potential outlet within the dominant punitive prison system prevalent globally today. The use of yoga as a form of rehabilitation, physical activity, and as a coping mechanism for incarcerated persons has been studied by scholars in various disciplines and with varying research methods over the last decade (for examples see, Rucker 2005; Bilderbeck, Farias, Brazil, Jakobowitz, and Wikholm 2013; Bilderbeck, Brazil and Farias 2015; Pham 2013; Auty, Cope and Liebling 2015; and Joseph and Crichlow 2015). For example, Amy Bilderbeck et al. found that participants in a research study in the UK examining the effects of yoga on a prison population over a ten-week period reported more positive effects, as well as reduced levels of stress and psychological distress, than the control group (Bilderbeck, Farias, Brazil, Jakobowitz, and Wikholm 2013, 1438). This study found yoga may also impact cognition, specifically sustained attention and behavioral inhibition, which suggests yoga’s potential for behavioral regulation (Bilderbeck et al. 2013, 1444). Similarly, a 2017 study in Sweden that followed 152 participants in a 10-week yoga group found that, compared to the control group, the group of yoga participants saw positive effects from yoga, including reduced impulsivity and antisocial behavior, which they argue are correlated with recidivism, further demonstrating positive results for prison yoga programming (Kerekes, Fielding, and Apelqvist 2017, 8). A qualitative analysis in a United States midwestern high-security prison facility also documented positive effects of yoga, notably a sense of self-awareness and responsibility, suggesting the potential of yoga as a restorative justice tool (Rucker 2005, 108). And a 2017 ethnographic study in Spain recounts the potential for yoga to not only have physical benefits for inmates but spiritual ones and that this may be the key distinction between yoga’s benefits and other physical activities (Griera 2017, 96). Given the ways in which prisons affect inmates’ sense of bodily autonomy and connection to themselves, yoga can be a revolutionary tool in recovering a sense of control of one’s own body beyond the physicality of this process, embodying a sense of something greater and beyond the physical self (Griera 2017, 97).

Mark Norman explains that yoga can be considered as a correctional alternative with the potential to contribute to long-term social change (2015, 80). More specifically, Norman outlines yoga’s potential in being a less aggressive, violent, or competitive form of physical activity in which inmates may participate, while offering something more holistic,
meditative, and peaceful, in opposition to other sport and physical exercise regimens that are commonly part of prison culture (2015, 87-88). Further, yoga can be a form of rehabilitation and may have positive effects on inmates and be an outlet for the development of positive social skills (Norman 2015, 90-92). Despite noted benefits and anecdotal support in this research project, however, Norman warns of potential shortcomings such as the uncertainty of whether the practice of yoga will result in long-term behavioral changes among inmates, the impacts on recidivism upon release when considering complex criminal behavior, or the interaction of other intricate social and political factors (Norman 2015, 91).

Jonathan Muirhead and Clare-Ann Fortune reviewed much of the prison yoga literature available from various fields. They find that yoga may be helpful in the rehabilitation of offenders and has been shown to have positive effects on variables such as impulsivity, anxiety, and substance abuse (2016, 62). In turn, Muirhead and Fortune also cite methodological weakness such as small sample sizes and a lack of randomization and comparison populations, in addition to general difficulties in knowing what type of yoga and what various yoga programs actually entailed in the research previously conducted (2016, 61). They suggest that different program elements such as a focus on more physical postures or breathing and guided meditation may influence results as well as if the group engaging in yoga have had previous exposure to the practice or even pre-conceived notions of what yoga is (Muirhead and Fortune 2016, 61).

Thomas Lyons and Dustin Cantrell also write about the potential of meditation and contemplative practices within the prison system. This research is relevant to the study of yoga in prisons, due to the ways in which many yoga practices incorporate meditation as a key element. The authors outline the potential to challenge the power dynamics of the prison industrial complex, specifically through addressing a ‘helper’ and ‘helped’ dualism inherent in the system and cultivating opportunities for building community (2016, 1369). This community-building can help target isolation, which is a key factor in recidivism among prison populations and can provide an outlet for seeking institutional change within the carceral system (Lyons and Cantrell 2016, 1370; 1365). Importantly, the authors point to the fact that a program that engages inmates in meditation does not necessarily address
mass incarceration if they simply treat individuals in disconnection from one another and do not lead to social and political activism (2016, 1370). They explain that “of all possible responses to a self-perpetuating, systematically racially-biased criminal justice system, meditation programs based on acceptance, silence, and stillness might seem to be the most ‘quietist’ of all possible programs, and least associated with activism” (2016, 1368). Although such practices alone cannot revolutionize the carceral system, they can be part of broader systems of social and political change and be a quiet, yet transformative, form of activism (Lyons and Cantrell 2016, 1371).

Against this backdrop, it is important to note the deep-seeded structural violences at play and the ways in which the prison industrial complex is designed to incarcerate particular bodies. Notably, Black and Indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented in the Canadian prison system at both provincial and federal levels, raising concern within policing, criminal justice, and correctional sectors in Canada (Owusu-Bempah and Wortley 2014, 2, 7). Black Canadians are incarcerated in federal prisons at a rate three times higher than the number of Black Canadians in the Canadian population (Maynard 2017, 5). Similarly, 30% of Canada’s prison population is Indigenous, while Indigenous people living in Canada only account for 5% of the population (Government of Canada, 2020). In a country that professes racial heterogeneity through values of equality, inclusion, and multiculturalism, there exist deeply institutionalized biases and systemic racism across sectors. This is very clearly exemplified within the prison system. Furthermore, women’s incarceration rates, particularly for women of colour, continue to rise rapidly in Canada and across the globe (Sudbury 2005, 164). Critical race activist and scholar Angela Davis reminds us that prisons function ideologically:

as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs—it relieves of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism (2003, 16).

An understanding of yoga in prison cannot exist outside of these realities or else prison yoga will remain an individualized therapeutic tool, detracting from the possibility of raising collective consciousness and challenging a harmful system in a way that is
meaningful. Yoga must be in conversation with broader decolonization efforts, especially given the high rates of colonized and racialized bodies within the prison system in Canada and elsewhere. Prison yoga must instead be read, experienced, and considered alongside the lived realities of largely marginalized people who make up prison populations and their unique lived realities. It is critical to consider factors such as the corporatization and privatization of prison services and how these relate to the expansion of prison populations that continue to rise since the so-called War on Drugs in the 1980s and subsequent “tough on crime” legislation that disproportionately affects low-income individuals and persons of colour in North America (Lyons and Cantrell 2016, 1368). To fail to consider prison yoga against this backdrop, Lyons and Cantrell argue, is to leave existing political and social structures in place and the system remains one of social control, rather than being systemically challenged and altered (2016, 1369).

Mainstream yoga and its applications within institutions such as prisons are “reflective of and embedded in contemporary racial, gender, sexual, economic and cultural power dynamics” and must be treated as such (Berila 2016a, 205). Berila explains that despite this reality, both the science and the philosophy of yoga offer pathways of both individual and collective liberation, tools to heal from trauma, and the potential to provide a space for marginalized communities to heal individually and also to build revolutionary and social justice driven communities and networks (2016b, 205). An understanding of prison yoga in this context is critical in thinking of yoga as not only a tool for social change, but also as a means of building personal and collective peace in conflict and post-conflict realities such as in the Colombian case, which will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.4.4 Peacebuilding projects utilizing yoga

Increasingly, yoga is also being utilized by groups across the globe as a mechanism to help individuals heal from past traumas that result from genocide and protracted civil conflict. Despite its vast, complex, and often contentious nature, yoga has had, and arguably will continue to have, an impact on well-being, and understandings of inner peace. Recently, for example, the World Health Organization recognized yoga as a health tool and began research on how to integrate yoga into universal healthcare (World Health Organization
In December 2014, the United Nations General Assembly officially declared June 21 the International Day of Yoga (United Nations General Assembly 2014). On June 21, 2015, 175 nations participated in the first-ever International Day of Yoga—six months after the United Nations General Assembly officially declared such a day. Together, these nations recognized yoga as a means of achieving harmony and world peace (International Day of Yoga 2016). The impact, reach, and varied understandings of yoga and its connection to peace continue to change and be challenged.

Several organizations have brought yoga into dialogue with ideas of social justice and peace, with far reaching theoretical and policy implications. Outside prison contexts, similar rehabilitation work has been done in various situations with marginalized populations—many of which have experienced trauma, displacement, and various forms of violence. In Venezuela, for example, as a response to violence, rampant poverty, and crime in the slums of Caracas, yoga has been offered in an effort to “bring peace to the streets” and unite people from divided territories in a collective space to practice together (Allman 2015). A local non-profit in Mindanao, Philippines, has used yoga to forge peace between the various groups implicated in the decades-long Moro conflict (Gomez 2015).

Yoga has also been practiced on the frontlines of conflict zones, such as Palestine, where the non-profit organization Fareshe has led various yoga outreach initiatives with displaced/occupied persons in the West Bank and within refugee camps in other parts of the region (Hatuqua 2012). Yoga programming for refugees has also been hosted in Gorom, South Sudan for Ethiopian refugee women as a way to reclaim their bodies after physical, sexual, emotional, and mental trauma(s) (Cue 2013).

Similar programs have been offered in regions welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers. For instance, programs at the International Rescue Committee’s refugee yoga initiative in Tuscon, Arizona, in the United States (Boele 2016) and the Ourmala project in London, England (Ourmala 2016) have engaged yoga to assist with integration into local communities and in coping with trauma and displacement. Yoga has also been utilized in post-conflict Rwanda, with programming led by the non-profit organization Project Air, focusing on HIV-positive rape survivors of the Rwandan Genocide in Kigali. Their work soon expanded to the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Project Air 2015).
Moreover, across Colombia, research and praxis-based organization Dunna is exploring yoga as a means of rehabilitating former guerilla fighters alongside victims of the conflict (Dunna 2016).

Such projects that mobilize yoga as a platform for community building and reconciliation are often on the periphery of what can be deemed ‘formal’ peacebuilding efforts (i.e., those sanctioned by the state, such as truth commissions or reparation schemes). These examples indicate that as yoga’s prevalence and formality within the realm of ‘fundable’ post-conflict efforts develop—particularly in conjunction with the rise of grassroots and not-for-profit support for yoga’s use in post-conflict spaces—its efficacy and prospects as a legitimate tool within peacebuilding practice and theory must be examined. Emerging, locally driven, grassroots peacebuilding programs are being influenced by the multifaceted sociocultural expressions of yoga and how those manifest differently around the world. For the most part, these projects were implemented to respond to immediate local needs and in remote regions by under-connected NGOs in terms of technology and funding.

Based on preliminary feedback and the relative success of these projects, more exploration into the use(s) of yoga in this way is warranted. Notwithstanding, many stories of yoga’s assistance in dealing with conflict and trauma are noted in fields of inquiry within the practice and study of peace. For example, Beth Catlett and Mary Bunn write on yoga’s potential as embodied feminist praxis, exploring whether yoga can serve as a form of intervention for diverse trauma-impacted communities in their healing processes (2016, 261). According to Catlett and Bunn, preliminary research on Project Air in Rwanda has shown promise and “has inspired a confidence that indeed such an approach is possible” (2016, 261). The authors see yoga’s potential to aid trauma healing and suggest that it could be particularly beneficial as part of an integrated holistic model of care (2016, 270). Catlett and Bunn note the importance of community leadership and state that Project Air eventually plans to turn the program over to local leadership entirely. The model was initially established and at the time of writing continues to function with volunteer yoga teachers coming from around the world for three-month periods. This model has been found to be less than ideal, due to high turnover and lack of consistency (2016, 266). Similarly, in Kenya, several yoga interventions by the Africa Yoga Project are underway
(Africa Yoga Project, 2020). Giambrone et al. highlighted the effectiveness of the projects and mapped yoga students perceived changes after completing yoga programs with the organization 2018, 166). Participants reported many benefits related to personal growth and emotional resilience as well as physical and social benefits (Giambrone, Cook-Cottone, and Klein 2018, 164).

In Colombia, emerging analyses and preliminary data from the NGO Dunna’s programming are positive. Their published data reveals that yoga is helpful in anxiety, depression, and aggression treatment among youth from low socio-economic backgrounds (Velázquez, López, Quiñones, and Paba 2015, 407). They found that youth in lower socio-economic backgrounds were at risk for behavioural and mental problems due to high levels of stress through their 12-week yoga-based intervention with 125 children (Velázquez et al. 2015, 410). Moreover, Dunna has studied the effects of yoga and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among ex-combatants from illegal armed groups in Colombia, where PTSD rates are as high as 37% (Quiñones, Maquet, Agudelo, and López 2015, 89). Participants in the study engaged in either a yoga program for 16 weeks or were part of the control group that continued with the standard demobilization program (Quiñones et al. 2015, 89). The results have shown a reduction in PTSD symptoms among those participating in the yoga-based program and suggest that yoga is an effective therapy for reintegrating adults with PTSD (Quiñones et al. 2015, 97). Several participants also expressed interest in continuing to practice yoga and some have shown interest in pursuing yoga teacher training, which offers possibilities for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sufferers to help others living with similar experiences (Quiñones et al. 2015, 97). This also offers possibility for employment for demobilized ex-combatants as yoga teachers and the potential “to change his or her life and break the cycle of violence by promoting knowledge, awareness and peace through holistic yoga” (Quiñones et al. 2015, 97).

Moreover, an independent researcher conducted a qualitative assessment of Dunna’s yoga projects in Santa Marta, in the social housing complex of Ciudad Equidad, where I conducted interviews as well, and found that participants self-reported positive changes related to aggression, interpersonal relationships and stress-levels following the yoga interventions (Liévano-Karim 2019, 1). The findings discussed the everyday violence
participants are exposed to (domestic violence, sexual aggression, fights between neighbours, violence towards security guards) and found the yoga interventions they participated in with Dunna to be effective at improving the overall well-being of participants (Liévano-Karim 2019, 9). Participants in the interventions reported that yoga was helping in addressing stress and aggression and might be beneficial in feeling more connected to one another as neighbours (Liévano-Karim 2019, 9). Liévano-Karim described Dunna’s interventions as particularly noteworthy, given its ability to connect people of diverse backgrounds through a low-cost community intervention (Liévano-Karim 2019, 10).

To offer some context that will be useful in understanding subsequent chapters, the Mayo Clinic defines PTSD as, “a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event” (Mayo Clinic 2020). The group the symptoms of PTSD can be organized into four categories: intrusive memories (for example nightmares, recurrent distressing memories, flashbacks, emotional distress or physical reactions to reminders of traumatic event); avoidance (for example of people, places, activities, thoughts); negative changes in thinking and mood (for example negative thoughts about self, hopelessness about future, feeling emotionally numb, difficulty experiencing positive emotions); and lastly, changes in physical and emotional reactions, (for example issues with sleep or concentration, irritability, anger, self-destructive behaviour, being on guard) (Mayo Clinic 2020). Bremner (2006) explains the impact of trauma on the brain and the chronic nature of experiences of trauma and concisely defines PTSD:

PTSD is characterized by specific symptoms, including intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, flashbacks, nightmares, and sleep disturbances, changes in memory and concentration, and startle responses. Symptoms of PTSD are hypothesized to represent the behavioral manifestation of stress-induced changes in brain structure and function. Stress results in acute and chronic changes in neurochemical systems and specific brain regions, which result in long term changes in brain “circuits,” involved in the stress response. Brain regions that are felt to play an important role in PTSD include hippocampus, amygdala, and medial prefrontal cortex. Cortisol and norepinephrine are two neurochemical systems that are critical in the stress response (Bremner 2006, 446).
PSTD may cause the nervous system to be hyperactive due to living in a sustained threat mode can result from a number of things such as exposure to a major violent or traumatic event or exposure to violence in smaller ways over a period of time (like living in a country experiencing conflict).

### 3.5 Yoga’s benefits as a tool for peace

From the perspective of elicitive peacebuilding, yoga as a breath and movement-oriented technique, and as a tool for personal and interpersonal transformation, holds significant promise. For example, yoga can be engaged as a non-prescriptive approach, focusing not on perfecting techniques, but on offering participants a series of options, tools, and modifications for their own individual practice and journey, each according to the needs of their own body. In this sense, yoga is not imposed by an outside expert; rather, participants are guided in an internal practice that affords them agency in directing their own practice. Similarly, yoga has the potential to offer a space to encounter emotional, mental, and physical discomforts. It provides some of the tools required for nourishing and building one’s own intelligibility through cultivating self-awareness and a harmonious body-mind relationship (Echavarría Alvarez 2014). Yoga’s breath and movement techniques may help elicit the resources of the human body engaged with the peacework process.

Furthermore, yoga calls on its practitioners to harness the present moment, a phenomenon that contrasts with conventional understandings and applied mechanisms of peacebuilding, such as truth commissions that focus on learning from the past and working towards a better future. This shift from the dominant model that in many cases uproots linear thinking and solutions for peace offers the potential for new possibilities and solutions to emerge that address conflicts in their complex and non-linear nature. This method also focuses on the dynamic processes and types of healing for individuals and groups (Dietrich 2013, 12). Though considered unconventional in modern peacebuilding frames, yoga has the potential to offer a well-rounded, locally driven, and empowering tool applicable in post-conflict realities.
As mentioned above, yoga has been used as a method of elicitive peacebuilding for individuals dealing with PTSD and complex trauma. The ripple effects of PTSD and complex trauma on the social and cultural dimensions of a society are pronounced, which makes social healing on individual and collective levels a critical part of peacebuilding and reconciliation in a transitional society. Trauma is often a full-body experience, from which a medley of symptoms including physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms can surface (Catlett and Bunn 2016, 259). Emerging research within the field of PTSD- and trauma-sensitive yoga points to the limitations in conventional therapeutic models and the need to explore complimentary modalities to more accurately address the complex idiosyncrasies of trauma (Nolan 2016, 32). Caitlin Nolan explains that one of the most critical elements of yoga in benefitting those who have experienced trauma, and its associated stress and anxiety triggers, is its impact on the autonomic nervous system that regulates the body’s reaction to stress (2016, 33). Focusing on the breath in yoga practice stimulates the vagal nerves, which “[impact] perception, cognition, emotional regulation and behavior” (Nolan 2016, 33). Yoga also fosters mindfulness, including an awareness of one’s bodily sensations that can be impaired among populations suffering from PTSD (Price et al. 2017, 300). Like trauma itself, yoga can also speak to the body as a whole.

It is also critical to note that in trauma-sensitive yoga, programming must be adapted from the conventional yoga class to meet the needs of participants who have experienced complex trauma. For example, some trauma therapy yoga for groups such as veterans involves sitting on chairs rather than lying down, as lying down can feel like a source of vulnerability and may be triggering. Creative and adaptable movement- and breath-oriented practices can hold great potential in various spheres, including within relational peacebuilding efforts as they draw on essential elements of human nature and human interaction, addressing trauma through alternative and complimentary avenues (Dietrich 2013, 112).

Of particular interest is the potential of yoga-as-peacebuilding as a primary vehicle to pursue, explore, and introduce the connection between individual notions and experiences of peace to community, national, and global ideas of peace. Dunna, the research and praxis-based organization I learned from in Colombia, has carried out work that exemplifies these
characteristics of elicitive peacebuilding. Though the cultural, geographic, social, and religious contexts are quite different in Colombia from the Indian origins of yoga, Dunna is applying yoga methods in ways that are culturally relevant and sensitive and are adapted to the needs and specific post-conflict context of its rehabilitation programming participants. Importantly, the project is led by local organizers, as opposed to being coordinated by an organization or by individuals from outside the region or context—a reality that is very common in post-conflict realities. In this sense, organizers are able to draw on communally held knowledge and offer a sense of relationality as Colombians who have also experienced the conflict in some way. This dynamic allows for the possibility to connect to the very human and interpersonal dimensions of conflicts that can be overlooked in large-scale peacebuilding projects that are often global north exports.

Yoga should not be generalized or idealized, obviously, but this notion is worth repeating, especially because yoga can be understood in ways that are divergent and are dependent on culturally and geographically different communities. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to understand how yoga is addressed, given its problematic ties to cultural appropriation, mixed ideologies surrounding religion, and the western commodity fetishism of yoga as sport or exercise. In this discussion, it is important to address how yoga philosophies have been coopted and instrumentalized, largely within global north-based societies, and the ways in which they focus primarily on neoliberal ideals of subjecthood and trends of self-betterment. Moreover, the multifaceted, colonial, imperial, and power-driven relationships yoga has forged over time, as well as modern-day manifestations, must also be at the heart of discussions of yoga and peacebuilding.

The multifarious ways that yoga is experienced in a local context within India and how this influences India’s national identity and subsequent transnational relations must be considered. Patrick McCartney explains the connections between the global yoga market and narratives of Hindu nationalism, where yoga forms a key element in India’s foreign policy and the country’s identity of soft power diplomacy (2017, 1-2). On the one hand, then, rebranding yoga as Indian is “a counter-hegemonical, postcolonial ‘take back’ that builds upon centuries of colonial rulers and frustration at how yoga is commodified and seemingly cut off from its cultural roots without due acknowledgment” (McCartney 2017,
2). On the other hand, the way yoga is being branded is in many ways linked to Hindu religious and cultural nationalism, as opposed to other religious and cultural practices within India. This markets India in a particular way and hence influences both domestic and international ideas of the Indian state and the practice and origins of yoga (McCartney 2017, 6). This is one dimension of modern yoga practices and representations of such practices that demonstrates the complexities of yoga as a global political, social, cultural, and religious entity. Historical and present-day dynamics, both local and transnational in nature, need to be considered when engaging yoga as a mechanism of peacebuilding. This is especially true when considering applying it as a tool in multifaceted socio-cultural settings where gender, race, and class intersect. Otherwise, such applications risk reproducing harmful trends in a peacebuilding setting where helper/helped, global north/global south, and liberated/oppressed binaries can thrive and where colonial and imperial narratives and inequalities among various groups of people persist.

Yoga can be adapted to various cultures and communities, as well as within physical spaces with very little room to move, or without the tangible instruments required for the practice. Additionally, it can be a cost-effective tool that draws on existing communally held knowledge and beliefs and can focus on the needs of a specific community with its members as key resources in this process (Lederach 1995, 32). In some places, yoga continues to be shared and reproduced in ways that are culturally appropriative or in ways that may not fit the values, beliefs, and healing aims of certain populations, however. While it is critical to ensure a collaborative community-based approach where participant input is central, it is equally important to ensure that yoga offerings do not replicate exclusionary or appropriative practices. Similarly, a context and culturally specific adaptation of the practice is required as it is with other healing modalities such as art, dance, or music therapy, as discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5 (Hyland Moon 2016, 52).

### 3.6 Concluding thoughts

Overall, the various projects mentioned in this chapter relate to yoga as a largely āsana-based practice and appear to be derived from, and influenced by, global north ‘mainstream’ interpretations of yoga as a practice focused on emotional, psychological, and personal
health benefits. These dynamics give rise to critical conversations on the ethics of yoga, the appropriation of practice, and its complicated global relationships. Intriguingly, many of the projects surveyed here, on some level, conform to stereotypical norms of modern yoga, while simultaneously challenging the limitations of modern yoga in its *en masse* consumed and commodified fashion mentioned earlier in the chapter. This dual function offers a potentially interesting point of inquiry on the limitations and potentials of yoga and peacework.

In this sense, yoga can embody, as well as challenge, qualities of imperialist and colonial power constructs. Specifically, the projects mentioned here attempt to challenge conventional peacebuilding and international aid models that too often employ top-down, north-south approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation, neglecting their grassroots and context-specific qualities. For example, in some cases, local community actors are leading yoga projects without the funds, directions, and policy aims of global north peacebuilding entities, a large step in addressing the shortcomings of peacebuilding on an international scale. Yet, when grassroots initiatives are based on varieties of yoga with strong western and modern influences, they also complicate dynamics of power, influence, and origin, while attesting to the ever-changing and technologically ‘advancing’ world where online resources alone challenge the travel of yoga and the way it becomes consumed, taught, and adapted.

It is important to reinforce here that modern yoga is often critiqued for its inaccessibility and exclusion of certain bodies based on class, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity. For example, issues surrounding the whiteness of yoga spaces, the countless accounts of cultural appropriation and the often-high participation fees. Yet, encouragingly, several of the programs noted in the previous section have challenged these norms of access and exemplify a high level of creativity, proving that very little material resources are required to receive the benefits of a practice that challenges the dominant view that yoga has become an intricate part of western consumer culture. Yoga taught through non-profit models that are often offered at low- or no-cost to communities challenge these norms of access.
Though there have been few academic conversations about the relevance of yoga in—and as—peacebuilding, the praxis-based examples listed above and research coming out of Colombia led by Dunna, demonstrates that creative (and possibly subversive) yoga projects are unfolding independently, across the globe. This, coupled with the historical roots of yoga’s connection to peacework and the theoretical possibilities of elicitive peacebuilding that engages a transrational understanding of conflict, offers new pathways of exploration. These interwoven ideas both challenge and expand traditional ideas, methods, and associated programming on how societies build peace. The global reach of yoga in peacebuilding both compliments and sometimes complicates ongoing critical debates surrounding questions of who owns yoga, as it asks scholars to address the intricate relationship societies have to cultural appropriation, historical forms of imperialism, and settler colonialism. Yoga undoubtedly has multifaceted transnational relations, given its international rise in popularity over the last few decades and its predominance in ‘western’ consumption and fitness trends. One can also see projects that challenge the trivializing of such a complex cultural practice, however. Globally, there is a trend in community-based projects seeking to go beyond individual notions of peace to ideas of healing, connecting, and reconciling with communal and relational impacts that go beyond the individual and beyond the mat.

These phenomena beg the question that is at the core of transrational peace research: Do the methods used to forge peace reflect the multitude of layers of individual beings and their communities and networks? If not, then how can peacemakers better address conflicts in all their complexities and bridge individual and collective notions of peace in the rebuilding of social fabrics in a more holistic way? Though a discussion of yoga and peacebuilding cannot address these questions in their entirety, the chapters to come seek to expand the conversation and push the boundaries of the peacebuilding sector.
Chapter 4

4 Methodological groundings and reflections: Community-based and feminist research

The following pages explore the methodological considerations made throughout the entire research process and surrounding the case study of yoga and peacebuilding in Colombia, in particular. In this chapter, I introduce the project’s research partner, Dunna, in more detail, as well as discuss my research fellowship and data collection phase in Colombia. After outlining the research questions explored, I discuss who the interviewees were, as well as introduce the research procedures and methods used to collect data. This chapter also addresses some of the theoretical and ethical concerns surrounding community-driven feminist research. Lastly, I discuss concepts such as self-reflexivity and researcher positionality and situate myself within the research narrative.

4.1 Research partner: Corporación Dunna

To inquire further as to how yoga is being utilized in unlikely spaces as a tool to cultivate collective and individual experiences of peace, my doctoral research was carried out in partnership with the non-profit organization Dunna in Colombia. Together with Dunna, I explored the central research questions discussed in the Chapter 1 and outlined in detail below in section 4.3. This was accomplished through interviews with staff, participants, community partners, and others working within the peacebuilding sector.

Dunna is a non-profit organization and research institution, headquartered in Bogotá, Colombia, that works across the country with numerous populations. Dunna works towards sustainable peace in creative, community-driven ways through various body-mind methods, primarily yoga training and practice, dance, and creative writing (María Adelaida López interview 2017b). The word ‘dunna’ means physical, mental and spiritual
equilibrium and is an Arhuaco1 term gifted to the organization by ‘mamos’ or Arhuaco spiritual leaders from the Sierra Nevada (Quiñones, López, and Lefurgey 2018a, 23). Dunna was established in 2010 and has engaged over 5,000 people2 in their various rehabilitative and peacebuilding programs, with the primary goal of working with Colombia’s most marginalized—those who often lack basic access to mental health supports and social reintegration opportunities.

Dunna’s work strives to address the gaps in the rehabilitation of societies by offering creative, outside-of-the-box, cost-effective, and cost-efficient strategies (Dunna 2018). Amidst and following the longstanding conflict(s) in Colombia, Dunna’s programs aimed and continue to aim to fill a gap in services offered for citizens who do not have adequate access or those for whom traditional (and often largely talk-centered, short-term therapies) are inadequate. Furthermore, they also strive to serve as a complementary resource in a multi-disciplinary approach to trauma, alongside conventional therapies being offered, including, for example, formal reintegration programming led by government and other entities for demobilizing persons (Quiñones et al. 2018a, 23). Dunna promotes an individual’s personal recovery from trauma and the well-being of those affected by conflict. Alongside this, they work on community-level peacebuilding and facilitate coexistence of Colombians, despite differing views related the conflict or other aspects of life such as religious, cultural, ethnic, gendered, and political views (Dunna 2018). The first projects Dunna carried out included working with demobilized persons managing PTSD and with children in vulnerable communities who live in violent contexts of intrafamilial violence (María Adelaida López interview 2017b). Today, the populations that Dunna works with include youth offenders, at-risk youth, demobilized persons, military personnel, victims of the conflict, victims of sexual violence, displaced persons as well as other low-income people, both directly and indirectly affected by the conflict, which is explored in more detail in Chapter 6 (María Adelaida López interview 2017b).

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1 The Arhuaco are Indigenous peoples who live mainly in northern Colombia in the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the Magdalena region of Northern Colombia, near the city of Santa Marta, which is where the first Spanish settlers entered Colombia.

2 This figure is an approximation provided by Dunna in January 2018.
The initial seeds of Dunna were planted after Co-Founder and Director María Adelaida López studied at the Bihar School of Yoga in India, where she was introduced to yoga used in many rehabilitative ways, from prison populations to cancer patients, and where she witnessed incredible results (María Adelaida López interview 2017b). Upon her return, she combined what she had learned about yoga with her prior training, which included political science, psychology, and cultural sociology, to work towards creating an initiative in Colombia that would combine social transformation with psychological rehabilitation (María Adelaida López interview 2017b). At the time, Colombia was in the midst of conflict and had not reached the current ‘post-conflict’ détente between the Colombian Government and the FARC. Dunna was created at that time as part of the movement towards peace. López explains that Dunna was created on the belief that “putting yoga to work in the benefit of society and individuals can create a transformation and an opportunity for peace” (María Adelaida López interview 2017b).

While in Colombia, I also interviewed Fernando Cortéz, the Executive Director of the Bolivar-Davivienda Foundation—the social commitment of Grupo Bolivar, a major banking company in Colombia. The Bolivar-Davivienda Foundation supports several peacebuilding initiatives across Colombia, including working with Dunna to empower women and youth, reduce inter-familial violence, reintegrate guerillas, and to work towards goals of sustainable economic development. The community-based projects they support aim to build peace and close social gaps within Colombian society through reducing violence and recidivism, as well as crime and trafficking (Fernando Cortéz interview 2018). He spoke in detail about learning the benefits of yoga and his decision to take a leap of faith and invest in a new pathway for peace in Colombia. He explained the initial steps Dunna took to ground their project scientifically, to make a strong case to the government and other parties that yoga for peacebuilding had vast potential (Fernando Cortéz interview 2018).

In partnership with a leading psychiatrist in Colombia and preliminary funding from the Bolivar-Davivienda Foundation, Dunna launched a research project assessing the effects of Satyananda yoga on post-traumatic stress disorder in ex-combatants from armed groups in Colombia. PTSD is estimated to affect over 37.4% of this population, a statistic that
propelled Dunna to explore the benefits of alternative and adjunctive therapies to treat the mass prevalence of this condition (Quiñones et al. 2015). Initial results of the effects of yoga interventions on PTSD in 55 participants were positive, but more evidence was needed to warrant an expansion of programming (Fernando Cortéz interview 2018). Their second sample of roughly 220 participants became the largest study of its kind globally. This study demonstrated statistically relevant clinical benefits of yoga as an effective medium to treat PTSD experienced by ex-combatants from armed groups in Colombia (Quiñones et al. 2015, 97). It also generated enough scientific backing to meet the requirements of the Colombian government and soon after Dunna began formally working in collaboration with Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (The Agency for Reintegration and Standardization)\(^3\) (Fernando Cortéz interview 2018).

\section*{4.2 Research timeframe and context}

During the timeframe of my own research (2014-2020), peace talks were being held between conflicting parties in Colombia and steps were taken toward sustainable peace. The official agreement between the federal government of Colombia under the leadership of then-president, Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was signed on August 24, 2016 in Cuba to end the active conflict in Colombia between these parties. Negotiations between the two parties had begun in 2012 and culminated in 2016. The agreement negotiated in Cuba later went to a referendum, where it was narrowly rejected with 50.2\% of Colombians voting against the peace agreement and 49.8\% voting in favor (Brodzinsky 2016). After the referendum results, revisions were made to the peace deal and it was subsequently sent to Congress rather than to referendum

\footnote{The Reincorporation and Normalization Agency of Colombia is a government agency in charge of overseeing the reintegration of demobilized populations into civilian life in a sustainable fashion (Reincorporation and Normalization Agency 2018). They focus on skills development of reintegrated persons and groups while promoting shared responsibility of external actors for reintegration, as well as promote coexistence and reconciliation (Government of Colombia 2018a). The agency was formerly known as The Colombian Agency for Reintegration.}
again, where it was formally passed on November 30, 2016. This marked a significant transition in Colombia for peace (Murphy 2016).

During the data collection phase of my doctoral research, I lived and worked in Bogotá between the months of November 2017 and February 2018 for a total of three months—almost exactly one year after the peace agreement was signed. The initial plan (decided on with Dunna) was to interview only people who were participants of Dunna’s *Ahimsa Program Yoga for Reconciliation* project, which leads tailored yoga curriculum for demobilized persons suffering from PTSD and includes programs where those demobilized persons engage in yoga with other community members directly impacted by the armed conflict. This includes those formally recognized as victims by the Colombian government or survivors of violence and serves as an outlet for reconciliation and restoring fractured social bonds. The demobilizing former combatants from this project were part of the study referenced above that Dunna led in collaboration with researchers and psychiatrists from the Universidad de Los Andes (University of Los Andes) who were researching PTSD in post-conflict communities (Quiñones et al. 2015). Given my scholastic and practice-based interests in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, I was very keen to engage specifically with this population, which aligned with Dunna’s desire to engage with qualitative and theoretical questions surrounding trauma and peace work in post-conflict Colombia. Dunna had great interest not only in a qualitative compliment to their rigorous quantitative analysis, but they also were interested in engaging with this topic through a feminist lens. They were eager to dive further into their observations on gender norms, masculinity, and machismo culture in the lives of their program participants and in Colombian society more broadly. Given my background in peace studies and feminist work, and my research in this field, this felt like an ideal fit that was a mutually beneficial, collaborative endeavor.

The exact timing of my research period in Bogotá (November 2017-January 2018, rather than April-Jun 2017) meant that I was unable to speak specifically to demobilizing persons

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4 The history of the FARC conflict in Colombia and the context surrounding my specific research project with Dunna are further elaborated on in the next chapter.
due to a number of factors including the social and political realities in Colombia at that time. This ultimately shifted the scope of the project and required adaptability. The signing of the peace agreement in particular, set into motion the restructuring of government departments that resulted in delays in funding and programming in Colombia—directly affecting organizations like Dunna. For example, some of Dunna’s projects were put on pause during this timeframe while they awaited approval of projects financed by government departments that were then undergoing restructuring. In response to this reality, we shifted focus to interviewing incarcerated male youth who were engaged in creative writing and yoga programs with Dunna in Tunja and Bogotá.

This meant my own ethics protocol at Western University required revision, and I sought special approval part-way through the process to work with youth. Such work requires the consent of a parent or guardian which would be needed in the event that I would be able to interview the incarcerated youth. I had begun the formal ethics process in November 2016 to conduct this research and the project was formally approved by the Office of Research Ethics at Western University on May 24, 2017.5

In the end, there were Dunna-led yoga programs underway during my research fellowship in the youth detention centre in Bogotá but I conducted interviews in Tunja with staff, yoga instructors, and youth taking part in a yoga teacher training. In addition to this population, I also interviewed people from a variety of different groups, including staff, donors, affiliates, and program participants of Dunna, experts in the fields of peace and social justice, like-minded NGOs in Colombia, as well as citizens at large. The interviewees who were involved had been directly and/or indirectly affected by violence(s) and the realities and uncertainties of living, in most cases for all or most of their lives, in a nation experiencing armed conflict.

I briefly note these factors to demonstrate how the context of the broader conflict and peace process affected the scope of the project and shaped its methodological orientation. As a

5 Research for this study was approved under Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (2017-109175-3012) on May 24, 2017. The ethics file number is #109175.
researcher, it was critical for me to adapt the project based on the socio-political contexts present. These factors informed the choice of research methods used, the means by which participants were recruited, and, ultimately, who the participants were.

4.3 Research questions

This dissertation seeks to understand how alternative forms of peacebuilding are being engaged in conflict/post-conflict settings. This research specifically looks at creative, arts-based, and mind-body integrative techniques and how they both differ from and compliment more conventional modalities and processes in ‘post-conflict’ realities. More concretely, this project narrows in on the method of yoga and inquires how it can assist in a process of peacebuilding. Together with Dunna, I explored the case of Colombia and looked at how their work informs the broader peace process in the country. This project was shaped by the following research questions:

1. How might yoga complement, contradict, or challenge existing rehabilitative and reconciliation-focused peacebuilding efforts following a peace process and more generally within conflict/post-conflict settings?

2. How is yoga different from or complementary to other ‘alternative’ methods of peacebuilding and rehabilitation in conflict/post-conflict such as art therapy, dance, creative writing, theatre, or sport?

3. How does yoga work on an individual level? What are the reported benefits of yoga on indicators of individual well-being, such as emotional regulation and processing complex trauma?

4. What tools can yoga offer in dealing with interpersonal and relational conflicts? What does yoga offer in navigating everyday conflicts with family, neighbours, and others?
5. How does yoga impact groups on a collective or community level in our societies? Can yoga be utilized in repairing social fabrics and rebuilding trust where it has been broken? For example, can yoga facilitate reclaiming physical community spaces affected by conflict or facilitate coexistence and empathy between community members with polarized views?

6. Lastly, can yoga on these various levels discussed have rippling effects on broader peacebuilding efforts? If so, how does yoga inform peacebuilding theories and the trajectory of peace studies?

4.4 Methodology

4.4.1 Mixed methods interviewing

In-depth, brief, and group-setting interviews were conducted with the seventy-three people who participated in this study. In-depth and qualitative interviews seek to record a subjective, rather than objective, understanding of lived experiences (Hesse-Biber 2007). The interviews sought the experiences of those working in and around Dunna, as well as citizens and organizations in Colombia, to gain insight into the experiences of a variety of differing perspectives, genders, and social and geographic locations. The interviews were semi-structured, in that a general frame and set of opening questions were provided for the interview; however, the interviews were unstructured in that they allowed for new questions and directions to emerge. Participants were given space, if desired, for expression and storytelling (Edwards and Holland 2013). This methodological choice also reflects the technique of individual storytelling (Veneracion-Rallonza 2015) that can be a powerful means of addressing questions of voice and authorship in qualitative research, while also challenging how and why knowledge is produced. The disruptive potential of this method allows for challenging simplistic narratives and generalizations as well as grounds the interview process in the particular, centering it around the lived experiences of participants (Rice and Mündel 2018, 6).
Further, this technique challenges predominant ‘victimization’ discourses, creating space for agency in telling one’s own story and participating not as an informant, but as a co-creator of knowledge. This approach allowed for the process to be structured yet flexible, making space for the interviewee to engage in the creation of knowledge within the interview framework. From the outset, a research interest of mine was to share marginalized perspectives that are often absent from the mainstream public discourse; offering insights into ‘hidden knowledge,’ by providing a platform where participants speak for themselves and do not have solutions prescribed to them based on statistical demographic data (Hesse-Biber 2007). Efforts were made to frame the project in a way that retrieved interviewees’ perspective while providing an open-ended space to allow them the authority to narrate their own experiences, which is in contrast to the ‘studied other’ (Hesse-Biber 2007). Following the principles of snowball sampling, I relied on referrals from co-workers at Dunna, colleagues from my peace studies network, as well as community members I met through other means. I began with a list of potential interviewees compiled in consultation with Dunna and then drew from the initial core interviews for further insights and referrals to build the remainder of the project. For example, a colleague working in Honduras referred me to contacts of hers in Bogotá. I also consulted several colleagues from my various peace studies and social networks in Canada and Colombia to get their input and to ask for referrals during the research process. Unexpected insights also emerged from surprising sources. For example, my landlord in Bogotá, who was very interested in the project, accompanied me to historical sites and museums, while very generously and regularly providing me with her insights and impressions on the conflict and peace process and connecting me to several participants. Snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Heckathorn 2011) is an ideal methodological choice as it is frequently chosen when working with ‘hidden’ or sub-groups of a population, as well as cases where membership involves social stigma. This sampling approach also aids innuancing data collection and brings into question how we think about and construct knowledge (McKeown 1999). It also offers the potential of reconceptualizing research hierarchies and power relations in social networks. And when viewed critically, snowball sampling “can generate a unique
type of social knowledge—knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional” (Noy 2008, 329).

As mentioned above, interviews ranged widely. Some were one-on-one, formal, high-level government, and non-profit sector discussions conducted in perfect English. Some were held in office boardrooms, on one hand, while others involved sitting with youth on the grass outside a youth detention dormitory with a prison staff member present alongside a Dunna staff member who translated the conversation from Spanish to English. The dress code, style of interviewing, and length of interview varied greatly from case to case, as is discussed further below. For example, some interviews were lengthy, ranging from thirty minutes to nearly two hours in length, while others were brief—some as short as five to ten minutes. All interviews were conducted in private conversation, but the atmosphere of the interview varied, including quiet office spaces, at a detention centre, in bustling cafés, in community centers, via Skype, and in outdoor spaces. All of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, with the exception of three group interviews with participants in the Viveka Program for Coexistence Program. In some cases, it was most appropriate for me to ask the questions directly to participants, while in other cases the questions were asked by and explained by a Dunna staff member who served as a translator. All the interviews began with obtaining verbal consent, the delivery of background information about the study (also found in the Letter of Information), including assurances of confidentiality surrounding the data collection and storage, and an explanation of participants’ right to withdraw from the study at any time. We also provided participants with an opportunity to ask questions and the option to receive a hard copy of the study documents (see appendix), which were provided in both English and Spanish. These included my local and international contact information and an overview of my research project’s vision and aims. I obtained permission from the interviewees to quote them directly using their full name, if they were comfortable. Most agreed and others wanted me to contact them for their approval of the specific quotations I wanted to use.
4.4.2 Interviewees

In total, 75 interviews were conducted (with 73 participants) over a 3-month period in both group and one-on-one settings. Those whom I interviewed come from 20 different regions of the country and from a wide age demographic between 14 and 75 years of age. Most interviews were held in person, with a few taking place over Skype due to scheduling issues and travel costs. The regional representation of the interviews is best depicted here on a map:

![Map of participant origin/location](image)

**Figure 1: Map of participant origin/location**

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6 In some instances, interviewees told us where they were currently living and in other cases, they identified another place where they identify as being from. In other cases, this information was not asked (e.g. group interviews) and so the place where interviews currently live is the place with which they have been identified for demographic purposes. In a few cases, interviewees were temporarily visiting or working in Bogotá or were contacted via Skype. These nuances are noted in the interviewee list that is located in the Appendix. It is important to also note that in the group interviews conducted in Ibague, Bosa, and Tunal, all participants were recorded as being from the place where they are currently living—where they might have moved from is uncertain. This was a methodological choice made due to time constraints and the group-nature of interviews. Unfortunately, this does not accurately reflect the true regional diversity of the group interviews, nor does it offer insights into internal displacement that are of particular relevance for people like the Santa Marta interviewees.

The individuals I interviewed can be classified into the following broad categories: citizens-at-large, incarcerated youth who are involved in Dunna’s yoga teacher training programs, participants in Dunna’s coexistence yoga programs, and other experts from various fields. Each of these is explored below.

4.4.2.1 Citizens-at-large

I decided to interview those whom I have called ‘citizens-at-large’ to contextualize the broader landscape of the peace process, and gain insight into how others might view Dunna’s approach to peacebuilding. It was important for me to know not only what Dunna participants, Dunna staff members, and subject-matter experts included in this project were thinking about peace, but also to understand what everyday citizens coming from a variety of backgrounds thought. These interviewees, who came from their own backgrounds of expertise and lived experiences, were not approached as part of Dunna, and nor were they sought out for being part of an organization of interest with an expertise in one dimension of this project. Instead, I found these interviewees through local friends and Colombian friends living abroad who connected me to contacts of theirs who they thought might be interested in talking to me about peacebuilding in Colombia. This is the least extensive group of interviewees, since the idea of gaining these perspectives in a more formalized way was initiated later in the research process and built upon the informal conversations I was already having on a daily basis. The perspectives shared here offer context and, in many ways, echo the many conversations I had with friends and other citizens during my time in Bogotá and throughout my travels across Colombia.

I also had the opportunity to learn from many Colombians in ways both formal and informal during my stay. For example, my landlord in Bogotá became a critical resource who taught me a great deal about Colombian culture, the conflict, and the country’s polarization. She shared her experiences with me in many informal encounters as well as in a formal interview. She also connected me with many other people, helping me to hear

different perspectives from both those who supported and those who did not support the government’s peace deal with the FARC. Furthermore, I also drew on knowledge I gathered through formal and informal gatherings with friends and colleagues both during my stay in Bogotá and afterward, via email and social media. Having the opportunity to spend quality time and engage in cultural and social events with my friends and their families offered many insights. For example, I was invited to a ‘Novena,’ a Colombian pre-Christmas celebration involving the reading of specific prayers, the singing of carols, and other holiday festivities for nine days leading up to Christmas with family and friends, and several dinners and family gatherings.

I also visited several historic sites around the cities of Bogotá; Santa Marta, a city on the Caribbean coast; Villa de Leyva, a popular tourist destination and Spanish colonial town in the Boyacá region; La Vega, a small village in Cundinamarca; and the Island of San Andrés, a Colombian island located off the coast of Nicaragua in the Caribbean Sea. I visited several museums displaying Colombian art, including the Museo de Oro (Gold Museum), a museum of artefacts from Indigenous Colombians prior to Spanish Colonization and, at the time, displays that hosted several Indigenous exhibits from around the world, including Canada. I also visited the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (Modern Arts Museum of Bogotá) and the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación (The Center for Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation). All of these conversations and experiences informed this research project in unique ways.

4.4.2.2 Incarcerated youth in Dunna’s yoga teacher training program in Tunja

I interviewed youth, local staff, and Dunna from the project “Shanti Program Reparation and Responsibility Development for the Young People of the Juvenile Detention System through Yoga and Dance,” which has worked with youth in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, and Tunja since 2015. I specifically interviewed participants of the Tunja project, since they already had programming underway during my stay in Colombia. More specifically, the program underway was for yoga teacher training (YTT), where several incarcerated youths at the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano Boyacá were being trained. Local yoga teacher and one
of the YTT facilitators, Tatiana Bernal (a yoga instructor from Villa de Leyva who teaches for Dunna in Tunja), described the program as much more structured than other yoga classes she had run where one might adapt based on the energy of the group or the participants’ interests or abilities. The training is rigorous, as it must meet international yoga teacher training guidelines and requirements (Tatiana Bernal interview 2017). She explained how yoga training has been having a big effect on participants, their peers, and even the staff of the youth detention centre (Tatiana Bernal interview 2017). Dunna Director María Adelaida López agreed. She relayed an anecdote about one of the staff members who initially did not want to participate, and who questioned the benefits of the practice, but who is now deeply invested in bringing more yoga programming to the youth detention center (María Adelaida López interview 2017a). Several staff members of the detention center, such as social workers, now practice yoga alongside the youth and report that the practice has been beneficial to them in their personal lives and also in coping with work-related stress (María Adelaida López interview 2017a). Participants in the program also reported being calmer, sleeping better, and some said they were fascinated by the material and all they were learning (Tatiana Bernal interview 2017). In addition to improving inmates’ lives and giving them something to be preoccupied with while incarcerated, the skills learned are transferable and may provide career opportunities as they reintegrate back into society in the future.

4.4.2.3 Participants in Dunna’s yoga programs for coexistence: Santa Marta, Tunal, Bosa, and Ibague

I interviewed participants from the program Viveka Program for Coexistence, a project supported by the Bolivar Davivienda Foundation and Prosperidad Social that works with citizens living in social housing units and seeks to contribute to coexistence skills. Many of the residents who live in the housing projects are low-income, displaced, and/or significantly affected by the conflict—and sometimes all three. Residents also have varying life stories and opinions on the conflict as well as the peace process, making living communally in the social housing complex challenging. In this case, yoga is engaged as a tool for community development and social repair, helping to forge an understanding processes of othering and forge connection.
During my time in Colombia, I spoke to yoga instructors, local organizers, and participants living in a social housing complex in the community of Ciudad Tunal, a neighborhood in the region of Tunjuelito in Bogotá, and also Ciudad Equidad, a community housing project home outside of Santa Marta, a city on the Caribbean coast in the northern Colombian region of Magdalena). In Santa Marta, I interviewed five women who had each completed four months of general yoga training with Dunna in Ciudad Equidad. Those whom I interviewed were in the process of continuing on in their training to become yoga teachers themselves in their community and, in some cases, the women aspired to follow yoga as a career path. One of their Dunna yoga instructors, Viviana Jaramillo, described Ciudad Equidad as “a very complex area that gathers people from the margins of Santa Marta’s society.” Many of the yoga participants are single parents/housewives who suffer some kind of illness or have been exposed to or experience violence in their lives (Viviana Jaramillo interview 2017). The housing unit has several issues, including cramped living quarters that are home to people with polarized views, which can result in violence (Liévano-Karim 2019, 2). A National Police-led diagnostic of the security situation in the community also pointed to criminal gang-related activities, vandalism, and interpersonal fights (Liévano-Karim 2019, 2). As part of Colombia’s reparations to those highly affected by the conflict, provided for in Law 1537, 2012 at article 12 (Government of Colombia 2012), there is provision for housing for Colombia’s most vulnerable, including those living in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than $30 USD per month, or who were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict—which encompasses roughly 85% of residents (Liévano-Karim 2019, 1). As such, Cuidad Equidad, with funding from Fundación Bolívar Foundation, who also were funding partners for Dunna’s yoga interventions there, was created to house 4,000 persons in the region (Liévano-Karim 2019, 1).

I visited the community housing complex in the low-income community of Tunal, a suburb of Bogotá, three times during my research fellowship. During those visits, I was able to participate in a group interview and in several one-on-one interviews with participants, coordinators, and yoga teachers. I was also able to take part in a yoga class and observe the format of Dunna’s yoga programs. Interviews were also conducted in a group format in the
communities of Bosa, another community within the Capital District of Bogotá, and in Ibagué, the capital of the central Tolima region of Colombia.

4.4.2.4 Dunna staff members and partners

I also conducted several lengthy interviews with key staff members of Dunna, including the Executive Director, Research Director, Research Assistant, board members, curriculum developers, and program advisors. In addition to speaking to Dunna’s participants, I interviewed previous/current donors and partners with whom they work. In-depth interviews were also conducted with a number of Dunna’s yoga instructors and program coordinators who work directly with participants across Colombia.

4.4.2.5 Other experts from various fields

During my stay in Colombia, I interviewed people who work with NGOs and organizations across the country with similar mandates, either working with mind-body approaches or in peacebuilding. I interviewed individuals who work with peacebuilding organizations such as UNICEF, Reprodpaz, Radio Cultural Uniautónoma (The Culture Radio of the University Autonoma of Barranquilla), Fundación Paz & Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation), Respira, 5Rhythms Colombia, Outown, and Red Colombiana de Actoría Social Juvenil (Colombian Network of Youth Social Actors). I also interviewed staff members from local government agencies and the Canadian Embassy, since they, too, collaborate with mind-body focused projects in Colombia.

I had the opportunity to attend a 3-day peace conference, entitled Build Peace, where I attended several workshops and presentations and interviewed local and international participants working with yoga or within post-conflict and peacebuilding fields generally. During this conference I attended a workshop called Yoga for Resilience led by the USA-based NGO, Feet on the Ground, who I also had the chance to interview.

4.4.3 Data security procedures and analysis tools

All the interview data for this project was recorded with a digital voice recording device. If a participant did not want to be recorded, they had the option to opt out of audio
recording. According to the ethics protocol approved by Western University’s Research Ethics Board, following each interview, I removed the recording device’s sim card and kept it on my person to travel home to my Bogotá apartment. Then, recordings were uploaded onto a digital, password-protected drive and on a password-protected laptop. Next, they were deleted immediately from the handheld recording device to ensure confidentiality and security of files. Files were given codes that involved abbreviations of critical data such as date, location, interviewee group, and initials. For example: COL1_STA_BOG_NQ_38 signifies interview #38, held in Bogotá (BOG) with Dunna’s Research Director Natalia Quiñones (NQ), a staff member of Dunna (STA), during the first research trip to Colombia (COL1). This protocol was followed to keep data well-organized and to keep raw interview data safe in the event that it was misplaced, stolen, or otherwise compromised. This same security format was followed with transcribed interviews, which were them digitally using their coded abbreviation, with no identifying information in the document. A password-protected file of the master list of names was kept separately.

The audio files were transcribed and translated by transcriptionists and translators who regularly work with Dunna. While having considered several options, with guidance from Dunna’s team, I decided it was optimal to hire local translation and transcription experts who would understand the specific language intricacies of the Spanish dialects that are spoken in the regions where Dunna works. It was also important to us to work with experts who are accustomed to the technical terms and concepts used by Dunna and who have previously worked on projects that were similarly sensitive and complex. More so, it was important to me that the transcriptions reflect the self-expression and vernacular of interviewees and as such interview data was not changed to be grammatically “correct.” I also felt it was critical that anyone working on the data was not only a professional in translation and/or transcription, Colombian/fluent in Colombian Spanish for dialectical nuance, but also aware of the research ethics and confidentiality guidelines of both Dunna and Western University. Four different language professionals worked with the data, all of whom live in the Cundinamarca province of Colombia. All had previously worked with interview data collected by Dunna and had background knowledge in working with sensitive materials and an awareness of complex terminology related to yoga, PTSD, and so on.
Though efforts were made by all those involved to adequately translate interviews in a way that represented the voice and perspectives shared by participants, errors in translation/interpretation can occur and dialects still vary within the Colombian context. Many interviews were also conducted in English and simply transcribed, making this an easier feat. On the other hand, interviews conducted in English were generally correlated with those who had attained a high level of education, or with greater social mobility and class status. All the participants in Dunna’s programs, in contrast, were interviewed in Spanish, and the data was then transcribed and translated. Moreover, interviews conducted in English tended to be held in more ideal settings such as offices, quieter spaces or via Skype. We also tended to have more time to spend together versus some of Dunna’s program participants who only had 5-10 minutes to share their thoughts after a yoga class, due to employment and childcare restraints. As such, I have more detailed data from Dunna’s staff, yoga teachers, and peace industry professionals, since we met for longer periods of time and were able to discuss a wider range of topics and in more detail.

The non-identifying data gathered from interviews was uploaded and subsequently managed using Quirkos, a software that assists in analyzing qualitative data through thematic analysis. I chose Quirkos over other commonly used software, due to its relatively user-friendly interface and due to the qualitative and open-ended nature of my interviews that were often unpredictable and unfolded in a number of ways, making the data not easily or directly comparable or quantifiable. I used Quirkos as a way to see my research visually and to highlight key passages using basic categories/labels to better conceptualize key themes and the relationships between them. First, I read all of the interviews via a printed copy where I highlighted key words, possible themes, and made detailed notes. Then, I read them each again on-screen via Quirkos. To upload interviews to Quirkos, I removed any identifying data and saved each interview as its own file using the coded abbreviation mentioned above.

Then, I highlighted passages under broad themes such as trauma, war, conflict, gender, paramilitaries, yoga. After broadly examining every interview and highlighting possible keywords that may be themes, I searched within each theme to refine and then refine again, to get to a comprehensive view of key topics that emerged. For example, the broad label
“paramilitary” was refined into sub-themes such as demobilization, FARC, ELN, peace process, and justice. Looking then specifically at FARC-related data, as one example, themes such as urban crime, power vacuum, reintegration, urban crime, rural/urban divide emerged. Moreover, a theme such as ‘peace process’ could be broken into several sub-themes such as government breach of trust, election fears, rural/urban divides, murder of social leaders, 2016 referendum, and activism. The sub-themes that emerged were then reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the different tensions that interviewees discussed and how they interrelate. For example, within the theme ‘rural/urban divides,’ key issues such as mass displacement, class divides, access to post-conflict services, quality of/access to opportunities, and education and the severity of the conflict by region were raised by interviewees. Here, trends emerged such as the prevalence of interviewees feeling as though urban voters determined the outcome of the ‘no’ vote in the referendum. This one example of rural/urban divides greatly affected rural Colombians who largely voted in favor of peace and are the most affected by the results of the referendum.

In addition to the several rounds of narrowing down passages of text into topics and themes, Quirkos displays each key word flagged in bubbles of graduated size. The size of the bubble reflects the frequency with which the theme was discussed, allowing for a visual representation of what was most important to, or frequently discussed by, participants. For example, government breaches of trust and a lack of faith in leaders both historically and presently was widely noted by interviewees. Religion was also a significant topic that emerged in discussing political divides and the upcoming election and the referendum. Additionally, discussions around the significance of yoga in participants lives as a spiritual practice and also the misconceptions around yoga related to religion were raised frequently by interviewees. These examples demonstrate how I used Quirkos as a complimentary analysis and visual tool alongside my own hand-coding of interviews, interview notes, and personal research journal that was kept throughout the process. Quirkos, as a research tool, helped confirm for me what key issues raised were and helped me more easily find key themes and see how they interconnect and inform each other.
4.5 Theoretical underpinnings of the methodological approach

The methodological considerations I made surrounding this project are critically informed by feminist research ethics and practices such as the values of self-reflexivity, researcher positionality, and community-driven research. Postcolonial and intersectional feminist understandings of the world call for the need to seek new and more equitable ways of understanding and engaging in the world. This includes engaging in research through means that are collaborative, allow for diverse representations of lived realities, allowing space to challenge conventional methods, and understanding of the world and their inherent biases and power dynamics. This decentering, or recentering, rather, can be an outlet to speak to the limitations of research in a way that acknowledges and works against historical legacies of colonization and oppression and the modern-day manifestations of these inequalities for various groups. In the pages that follow, I briefly discuss some of these concepts and how they have influenced the methodological choices and the framing of this research.

While it is important to theorize not only why these frameworks are important, it is useful to also ask how they can be put into action, and the challenges, contradictions, uncertainties, and possibilities that arise in doing so. From my personal experience, it has been imperative for me as a researcher, seeking to conduct feminist, community-centered research, to carefully choose and substantiate my methodological choices, but also to go even deeper in deconstructing the foundations from which the knowledge(s) I engage with are constructed and how my understandings of such knowledge(s) are shaped by my own social location and life experiences. Developing a theoretical grounding of research methodologies themselves is an often-overlooked step in the research process. This includes an understanding of the positionality of the researcher, as well as what research tools will be engaged—providing a blueprint for what is to come (Grant and Osanloo 2014, 12). This theoretical framing informs the rest of the design, shapes research questions, and helps to situation the research project more broadly (Grant and Osanloo 2014, 16).
Postcolonial and intersectional feminist methodologies

The methodology of this dissertation is theoretically informed by an understanding and acknowledgment of how critically important postcolonial and intersectional feminist contributions have been within the fields of women’s studies and peace studies and, more broadly, in social change and transformation. These frameworks unveil the complex interplay of mutually constitutive oppressions and their systemic and historically rooted dimensions. These contributions also call us to critically address our own standpoints and speak to the reality of epistemological violence in research and the power dynamics that can be reproduced (Sholock, 2012).

Postcolonialism, as Leon Tikly and Tim Bond describe, includes a plurality of understandings and dynamic cultural contexts and should not be homogenized with only one meaning, given the intricacies of colonialism historically and the ways in which it manifests presently in ways that are complex (2013, 424). Given current realities of new forms of imperialism and colonialism in modern globalization, it is helpful to understand postcolonialism as “a general process of disengagement of formerly colonised countries from European colonialism and classical imperialism and their reinsertion into the flows and networks that characterise contemporary globalisation” (Tikly and Bond 2013, 424). Postcolonial feminist research reveals “diverse layers of colonial praxis as saturated with hierarchical notions of gender, sexual coercion of women, the inability to respect or understand non-colonial social arrangements which involved gender, and the consistent overall degradation of women” (Bennett 2010, 24-25). Postcolonial research acknowledges colonialism as inherently violent, albeit epistemologically, as embodied by persons or institutions, or through economic power and injustice (Bennett 2010, 25). Postcolonial feminist research, then, seeks to highlight the ways in which the experiences and writings of predominately white women from western or Global North locations have been centralized within feminism historically (Narayan 1988). It is critical to postcolonial feminist research to “destabilize the dominant discourses of imperial Europe” (McEwan 2001, 94). In doing so, there is opportunity for participant agency. From a contemporary lens, as well as a historical one, norms present themselves in a modern neocolonial reality. Participants can come from various socio-political backgrounds, geographies, and are
speaking bodies from a variety of different cultures and languages. Prominent feminist postcolonial work has looked at levels of vulnerable engagements with research participants or other members of society that have been extremely oppressed, such as the popular coinage of the ‘subaltern’ figure in prominent work by Gayatri C. Spivak. Spivak describes the subaltern as a member of a population excluded by from dominant power structures and one who is exploited socially, politically, geographically, and linguistically resulting from the structures of imperial projects and colonial histories.

Gayatri Spivak theorizes this concept in her expression of the ways in which the subaltern must conform to the ways of knowing the world and the expressions of such knowledge in a way that conforms to a ‘western’ way of life (Spivak 1988, 66). For Spivak, knowledge and its production are not neutral or objective but express the interests of those producing it and is a commodity itself (1988, 66). Spivak writes that, “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between modernisation, culturalism, and development,” to explain how the subaltern woman is disadvantaged by the mechanisms of modern society (1999, 304). This understanding is pertinent in academia where the researcher is framed as the expert and the knower about colonization and the situatedness of the other, while speaking for the colonized and about their oppression. bell hooks eloquently captures this dynamic when she writes,

no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk (hooks 1990, 343).

She explains the need to not mask these discussions with inclusive language or tokenized inclusion, but to really ask not just what we speak about but also how and why, rather than continuing the same exclusionary means of speaking for and about others rather than challenging the system altogether (hooks 1990, 343; Alcoff 1991).
Postcolonial feminism also points to the risks in homogenizing the categorizations of being, such as ‘woman.’ It is a framework that aids in the theorizing of how we know what we know; how we learn and see the world and the ways in which these fundamental processes of being are biased and filtered through a particular lens. For example, the decentering means that postcolonial feminist research calls into question the harms of various aspects of colonial white culture, such as capitalism and the privileging of economic gain, ‘development,’ and industrialization as markers of the success of nations globally (McEwan 2001, 95). Global realities—such as the dominance of capitalist frameworks—urge for alternative knowledges and world views to enter the conversation, recovering “the lost historical and contemporary voices of the marginalized, the oppressed and the dominated, through a radical reconstruction of history and knowledge production” (McEwan 2001, 95).

Postcolonial feminist research is committed to going beyond mainstream representations of gender and dominant hegemonic norms and seeks to incorporate the intersecting identity constructions and lived realities of research participants. Engaging with postcolonial feminist academic work and frameworks unfolds alternative ways of researching that are more representative of diverse lived experiences, in a way that acknowledges historical legacies of colonization and oppression and their modern-day manifestations. Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2018) explains the risks of speaking for others and the ways in which women from the Global South have been spoken for and about in privileged academic writing by women of the Global North in what she deems as a form of academic colonialism (2018, 2). She explains that “many postcolonial feminist scholars have critiqued and cautioned about the use of feminist ideologies and practices emanating from Western, white, and middle-class positions of privilege as the way to understand the experiences of women in the Global South” (Ozkazanc-Pan 2018, 2). Postcolonial feminism asks researchers to attempt to see from the perspective of another in ways that are both responsible and respectful, while engaging with issues of power and inequality and encouraging coalition-building across difference (McEwan 2001, 105).

The underpinnings of postcolonial theory are significant in any research involving dynamics of power but are particularly pertinent in ‘international research’ and ‘fieldwork’
undertaken by a Global North worker, volunteer, or researcher, in contexts outside of their own. Feminist research, too, despite its best intentions, can be problematic, reproducing many of the norms it seeks to advocate against when it comes to inequality—dichotomizing the liberated ‘western’ feminist as ‘international expert,’ while disempowering and, in some cases, disenfranchising feminists and women from the Global South (Bell and O’Rourke 2007, 39). With these considerations in mind, throughout this work I have aimed to both reflect on these ideas and put them into praxis wherever possible.

Furthermore, intersectionality as a concept is often taken up in feminist spaces and in spite of the researcher’s good intentions, can sometimes be done in a superficial manner. Intersectionality is applied, discussed, and conceptualized in a number of academic and social justice spaces as both a lens and tool in nuancing binaric and limiting conceptions of gender and has become a key part of feminist critical inquiry (Lewis 2013, 869). Intersectionality is a complex and frequently discussed theoretical framework and is employed across disciplinary confines in research, teaching, and praxis. Intersectionality draws light to the transecting realities of identities associated to race, class, ability, language, sexuality, which are impacting the lives of women, their relations, advocacy, work as well as the complex representations of these globally. Analyzing societal systems and structures with an intersectional lens can be important in developing research that exposes complex relationships between inequalities. First defined by feminist and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality offers a more thorough and critical analysis as it urges the researcher to account for multiple intersections of identity and identify inherent racism and other inequalities. In one article, Crenshaw (1991, 1245) discusses research she has conducted at a women’s shelter and the dynamics of intersectionality which she observed during this project, stating that:

In most cases, the physical assault that leads women to these shelters is merely the most immediate manifestation of subordination they experience. Many women who seek protection are unemployed or underemployed, and a good number of them are poor. Shelters serving these women cannot afford to address only the violence inflicted by the batterer; they must also confront the other multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often converge in these women’s lives hindering their ability in create alternatives to abusive relationships that brought them to the shelters in the first place.
Similarly, in a 2020 interview with TIME magazine, when asked to reflect on what intersectionality means to her 30-years later, Crenshaw defines the concept as “a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz 2020). She explained:

We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts (Steinmetz 2020).

These statements encapsulate the necessity of nuancing and decentering the way we analyze, research, and engage with lived experience, while looking critically at issues such as systemic racism that disadvantage some women and not others. An intersectional lens, then, can offer insight into the social, political, educational, geographic, and economic realities of women’s experiences.

Intersectionality has sought to expose how “single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 878). Kathryn Henn echoes this in saying that intersectionality, despite its complexities, serves as an important ‘cautionary reminder’ not to speak for others and that “retaining this anti-essentialist core means resisting applications that succumb to empirical colonialism” (2013, para 39). Jennifer Nash (2008) outlines three main functions of intersectionality: first, it allows for more complex theorization through destabilizing binaries (surrounding race and gender for example); second, it aspires to provide a vocabulary for “critiques of identity politics” in effort to mediate the tensions between multiple identities (e.g. demonstrate racial variations within gender and vice versa); and third, it serves as an invitation for feminist scholars to grapple with and “come to terms with the legacy of exclusions of multiply marginalized subjects from feminist and anti-racist work and the impact of those absences of those absences in both theory and practice” (3).

Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall also explain that intersectionality is a well-travelled concept that has been taken up and interpreted by many practitioners and scholars and functions more as a “nodal point” vs. a closed system—posing as “a gathering place for open-ended
investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities” (2013, 788). The origins of intersectionality are rooted in black feminist thought and critical race theory; yet, over time, this concept has sometimes been used for other means by scholars and practitioners (even those working towards feminist and liberatory goals). Intersectionality has also been critiqued by some as being reduced to an academic buzzword (Davis 2008; Nash 2008) or an epistemic intransigence in how it is understood and engaged with, in contradiction with its original intentions (May 2014, 94). Because of intersectionality’s rise in prevalence within scholarship, this lens to theorize across difference through “challenging institutions and radical political projects” has itself become “an institutionalized project, and the dominant tool for excavating the voices of the marginalized” and as such it is imperative to look critically at intersectionality as a tool and a concept (Nash 2008, 13). Vivian May explains that it is “imperative to trace patterns of cooptation and dismissal but also to ask, in line with Angela Davis, why intellectual contributions developed by women of color, such as intersectionality, continue to be used without adequate attribution or meaningful connection to their wider literatures” (2013, 107). Intersectionality, then, is often taken up in feminist spaces as a concept, yet it does not always reflect the initial intentions of the concept and risks being superficial in nature. Vivian May describes this as an often unwitting though harmful unconscious slippage away from intersectionality, demonstrating the limitations in academic conversations and applications of intersectionality, devoid of a real commitment to what the concept confers in our own lives and work as scholars (2014, 108). In that sense, the use of intersectionality provides, “a catchy and convenient way of expressing the author’s normative commitments. It allows her to express her familiarity with the latest developments in feminist theory, without necessarily exploring all the ramifications of the theoretical debates” (Davis 2008, 75).

Though intersectionality is one of (if not the) most important contribution to women’s studies as a discipline in how it expands the study of gender and women’s lived experiences, exactly how to study intersectional phenomena and the appropriate methodologies to do so is less well understood (McCall 2005, 1771). It is clear that engaging with research methods that reflect the principles of intersectionality can be pivotal in reshaping research, advocacy, and policy by offering a more inclusive picture of
realities that challenge structures that can ‘other’ and subordinate, while drawing attention to complex axes of power and privilege (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 800). Intersectionality as a research tool can revolutionize how research is conducted, analyzed, and represented. For example, in the design of a research project, marginalized voices can be brought from the margin to the centre and specific voices that are not commonly included in discussions can be invited to the conversation (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 801). Also, not universalizing, homogenizing, or making assumptions about interviewees’ lived experiences in research analysis is critical when considering the socio-political applications of intersectionality in applied research (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 800). With that said, it is important to note that taking such measures is difficult, not linear and does not always go as planned in praxis. It can also be performative of researchers to assume that this kind of care, or depth of analysis is either easily or fully accomplishable.

If we know that an understanding and thoughtful application of intersectionality is critical to sound feminist research, it is important to understand not only how the concept can be taken up in theoretical analysis, but also in the process of data collection through interviews and learning from participants and partners. The broadness and seemingly all-encompassing nature of intersectionality can pose difficulty in translating the theoretical underpinnings of the concept into an actual research methodology—in a way that is tangible—especially given its cross-disciplinary understandings and applications. What does it mean to engage with intersectionality in praxis when conducting your own qualitative research project? How do we translate the core components of the theories of intersectionality (that are already complex and up for debate) into applied feminist research?

Elena Ariel Windsong focuses on three major aspects of intersectionality as a means to discuss the theory’s applicability in research methods: the shift from additive analysis, relationality, and social constructions of race and gender (2018, 136). A move from additive analysis implies a rejection of hierarchal or dichotomous thinking, which classifies people as “more or less oppressed/privileged” (Windsong 2018, 136). This arguably also challenges the victim/perpetrator dichotomy and how a binaric understanding risks
simplifying complex and ever-changing lived experiences of people that may intertwine a multitude of conditions of oppression and privilege at the same time and may be lived and interpreted quite differently than someone else with similar social/identity markers (Windsong 2018, 136). This distinction is critical when considering interviewees and the temptation to group, classify, and categorize them to enhance knowledge translation in the research results, which can result in an oversimplification of their lived experiences and generalizations that detract from the data. This is of particular relevance in interviewing within a complex social and political reality, like a country in transition from a conflict spanning both across complex geo-political and social divides and over several decades. In this case study, participants have been both victims/perpetrators, oppressed/privileged, and so on, and those complexities are arguably beyond linearity and quantifiability. As such, generalizing conclusions and attempts to categorize and prescribe by the researcher(s) would do a disservice to the stories and lives of those who shared with us during the data collection phase.

Echoing this, Windsong’s second categorization of relationality confers the importance of understanding complex concepts and meanings in their relationship to one another, such as understanding gendered ideas of womanhood and women’s role in societies in concert with masculinity (2018, 137). Examining the complexities of both processes together, seeing them not only as non-hierarchal, but as relational rather than separate is important. Windsong draws our attention to social constructionism and the importance of understanding concepts such as gender or race as not biological and essential, but instead as socially derived and not static—as a means to draw attention to power dynamics while problematizing generalizations and offering an attempt at drawing attention to the complexity of life and of being (2018, 137).  

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8 It is worth noting that although Windsong, makes the link to research methods and states the importance of engaging intersectionality in feminist research, her approach is not rooted in the dismantling of anti-black racism, precisely, nor is she a critical race scholar.
4.5.2 Reflections on theory and feminist research ethics in praxis

Jennifer Nash succinctly writes that “identity is complex, that subjectivity is messy, and that personhood is inextricably bound up with vectors of power” (2008, 13). As such, this landscape is a starting point to better understand the way we have come to know and be in the world and the contradictions that live within our work, our theorizing, and deeply within our own narratives and the lenses through which we explore the world. This lens is perforated with contractions, conflicts, and paradoxes. What then does ‘feminist inquiry’ look like with the tension of striving for more from academic research, while simultaneously embodying some of the fractured and problematic elements it seeks to transform? What does theoretical inclusivity and intersectionality in a research process look like, and is it even possible? How then do we engage in research in meaningful ways in the wake of such epistemological asymmetries and tensions? Many of my reflections, journal notes, and conversations in and around this project have touched on these questions.

During my time with Dunna, for example, we frequently discussed theoretical considerations such as discussing colonialism, neo-colonialism/imperialism, and the role of Dunna in decolonization work within the Colombia context. We considered this reality in the context of the aid/non-profit industry and the role of international organizations and researchers, as well as in relation to the complex conversations of yoga and how it is understood and taken up at Dunna.9 Together, through interview sessions and informally, we unpacked cultural and ethnic whiteness in the Colombian context from the historical complexities of Spanish colonization and the modern-day inequalities that persist, and that still divide Colombians by race and class today.

We also addressed my own whiteness, which was very different as an anglophone white woman and Canadian settler from the Global North, making me an ‘outsider,’ particularly in the perception of Dunna’s program participants—especially in the more rural contexts where we worked. We discussed how this might be perceived, how it might affect our

9 We also wrote about these reflections collectively in a paper that was later published in Race and Yoga; see, (Quiñones): et al. 2018a).
research, and how we wanted to structure our partnership in the context of ongoing international development narratives that also includes a critical nuance of the academic researcher who ‘goes abroad’ to ‘extract’ knowledge and resources for their own knowledge creation processes and academic achievements. It was critical for us to engage in an ongoing discussion about how my role was understood and how it would adapt and shift as we went.

Because Dunna also functions as a research institution, they had the capacity to host, guide, and collaborate with a junior researcher/student like me—a very unique reality. When I came across Dunna online in the months prior to meeting them to discuss my partnership idea, their website said they were actively seeking international and local research partnerships. Many of the senior staff at Dunna had previously completed rigorous research projects with various local and international universities or as part of their own graduate studies, so there was a mutual understanding of what was required by my home institution and what this project could realistically look like. With that information and knowing that Dunna had the structures to support academic researchers in place, I felt comfortable to reach out and discuss a partnership to see if our research goals might align. I also felt comfortable working on the research proposal with Dunna because of the groundwork of relationship-building that was already in place when it came time to pose my interview questions to participants.

In our initial conversations, we determined that we had compatible research goals and interests (e.g., research through a critical feminist lens, peace sector research) and this laid the groundwork for our partnership. The partnership between Dunna and me was framed, as much as possible, as a research fellowship, where I would learn from Dunna and they would oversee my project and help inform its trajectory based on our mutually determined goals. As such, it was important that my research project offer something complementary to previous research projects, but also different—filling a gap and expanding on existing research. Moreover, it was imperative to me that the research I conduct be tangible and

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10 This information was stated on Dunna’s website when I initially made contact in 2016 to ask about the possibility of working together.
useful to the organization beyond my own research goals alone and that it not pose a financial or time burden on them to host me. We also began the brainstorming process many months before I actually arrived in Bogotá. We had Skype calls and many email exchanges to discuss what beneficial work I could undertake that would also meet the goals and needs of Dunna; what was feasible during my time in Bogotá that would meet my research needs; and the guidelines I needed to follow to stay within the bounds of the ethics process of my home institution. Furthermore, we discussed what types of interviews and work I could partake in and how long I should stay.

Together, we also created a research proposal and a workplan/schedule. I committed to writing a final report about my time in Colombia for Dunna, beyond the research project itself. During my time in Bogotá, we held weekly team meeting at a minimum; however, we often met several times a week to do interviews together or have discussions. Additionally, it was critical to be in frequent dialogue and collaboratively approve research questions, potential interviewees, and travel within Colombia. We also decided that we would try to publish some of the research findings collaboratively as an output of my time with the organization. I also offered to help the organization with English language editing, grant/report writing, and projects they were designing that dealt with gender/feminist concerns. In addition to logistical planning, Dunna furnished me with previous research reports and other critical readings so I could familiarize myself with the broader context in which their projects exist, both before arriving in Bogotá and during my stay.

In many respects, this type of deeply engaged partnership would presumably not be possible or else would be made much more difficult in the context of a short-term research partnership involving a grassroots non-profit, due to typical constraints in the sector, which include low staff, overwork, and financial precarity. In that sense, I was very fortunate to be able to partner with an organization that was both engaged in community work and large-scale research on this work. My research was possible because Dunna had the capacity for their Executive Director and Research Director supervise my work, as well as provide me the assistance of a research assistant, a local university student, for a few hours a week, to help me navigate Bogotá, help with translation, and so on. Dunna’s research assistant, Alejandra Orjuela Garcia, also provided critical insights about culture, politics,
and history in Colombia, which are cited throughout this work. She had also been working directly with many of the populations interviewed and already had a rapport with interviewees in many cases. Her assistance in this project is truly invaluable.

Dunna had also already undertaken rigorous ethics procedures in collaboration with local and international universities, established trust with their participants/communities, and had been collaborating with programs/organizations within which I interviewed, long before my fellowship began. This made for a very smooth data collection process, given that many of the classic ‘outsider’ research shortcomings has been addressed (e.g., that participants were comfortable engaging in interviews and trusted Dunna). Without this critical foundation already in place, I do not think my project would have been possible logistically, nor would I have felt comfortable engaging in research where these fundamental feminist research ethics could not be put in place.¹¹ In this unique case, rapport was already built, and protocols and support measures were in place in the event that the research questions or dynamics during my interviews were triggering. When I interviewed participants in Dunna’s programs, it was often not their first time to take part in research conducted by Dunna, as this has been a regular part of their programming—albeit, for a different specific research study or general program evaluations and feedback opportunities from participants. When I was introduced to the participants, Dunna staff and I explained what I would be doing, for what purpose, and how it contributed to the broader research goals of Dunna and of the ongoing research, of which participants were already part. Participants were already comfortable with the ethics protocols and commitment to confidentiality by Dunna, which made for a smooth research process for me.

In most cases, when interviewing participants in Dunna’s programs, I was in contact with the participants for a full day, sitting in on yoga classes and training sessions, learning alongside them. At one event, for example, participants invited me to practice yoga with them and to also share in a pot-luck meal together, where we each brought a food item to

¹¹ For example, before learning about Dunna and having the opportunity to work with them, a previous research project idea of mine involved conducting interviews via Skype with organizers of various yoga projects with a social justice focus from across the globe. This would have meant a much broader scope and the exclusion of interviewing vulnerable populations directly.
share. We therefore spent several hours together before the recorded interviews took place. In all of the interviews with participants, trust was built because of the understanding that I was part of Dunna’s team, that I was working with the organization directly, and that the same research ethics and guidelines they had previously experienced were in place. Dunna trusted me and integrated me into its team and structures, and this assisted me in easily building this trust with participants. I felt comfortable with the questions I had prepared because they were co-created mindfully with the experienced staff at Dunna, with the goal of speaking to the research questions of my broader project, but also in answering questions Dunna sought to understand, complementing their existing research. The questions were designed to be open-ended and adapted, in order to follow where participants wanted to take conversations.

Moreover, it was also important to me that the interviews undertaken in the community be at Dunna’s discretion and recommendation so as not to create conflicts of interest. For example, Dunna had formal and informal partnerships and relationships to other organizations in Colombia and it was important for me to know and understand their relations and engage not only in my own research interests, but in a way that represented Dunna well as a research fellow of their organization. This was an intentional choice in an effort to build trust and work collaboratively towards mutual research goals together. We also very frequently discussed Colombian culture and what it meant to interview in this particular post-conflict/conflict setting. For example, there were different clothing guidelines or interview supplies needed in each setting. For interviewing a donor to Dunna, business attire and a formal notebook were recommended. In interviewing in low-income/rural communities, it was recommended that staff wear relaxed clothing, without name brands or other obvious class markers, such as flaunting high-priced electronics, as a way to reduce the perceived social and cultural distance between the interviewer and interviewee, given the wide class gaps and structures that exist in Colombian society.

Dunna as an organization, and the work we engaged in together, follow the principles of what Martin Mulligan and Yaso Nadarajah outline as community-engaged research (2008). Community-engaged research requires long-term commitment, procedures to gain regular feedback from the community through both formal and informal means, as well as the use
of a wide range of research methods that harness local knowledge and experiences (Mulligan and Nadarajah 2008, 92). In line with the principles of community engaged research, Dunna regularly works with its program participants—in some cases over a period of years. Dunna’s yoga instructors, for example, work with their participants, sometimes for a condensed period, such as daily, for several weeks, or months, or on a regular weekly or bi-weekly basis over a longer period of time. Based on observation within the participant groups with whom I engaged, participants seemed to have a comfortable rapport with Dunna staff that had been built over several encounters. Some participants also expressed eagerness to participate in research and told me that the relationship between Dunna and participants was mutually beneficial, as they not only received Dunna’s services, but were able to share their experiences and shape academic research on the topic. Participants were also frequently involved in giving feedback to Dunna organizers, which, over time, has greatly shaped their program design. Additionally, Dunna has introduced measures to ensure that projects are sustainable, such as training participants to become yoga teachers for Dunna or within their own communities. The sustainability of Dunna’s vision and their committed presence to the communities and people they work for also helps to ensure that projects like mine that are more short-term in nature, can exist without the risks and challenges of offering a one-time project with little follow-up or tangible benefit to participants. A key challenge to sustainability, is of course funding barriers and short-term funding cycles for social science research (Mulligan and Nadarajah 2008).

12 Mulligan and Nadarajah conceptualize community-engaged research as different from a classical research process because of how it makes clear distinction between having an outside expert come into a setting to problem-solve versus framing a project around the knowledge of community members (2008, 81).
13 As previously mentioned, some of the work with various Dunna groups of participants had to be put on hold or delayed due to government departmental restructuring and associated funding changes or delays. Though I could not speak to members of all of these groups to hear their sentiments, there did appear to be consistent communication with various groups about the experienced funding delays and changes to programming through regular visits by Dunna leadership in addition to transmitting information through local organizers. One group that I did meet with who were experiencing funding delays, was a group of women in Santa Marta. They had all completed Dunna’s program and were waiting for approval to move forward with their yoga teacher training. There were some delays with this, yet they continued to meet informally and practice together and showed empathy rather than frustration regarding these delays. Moreover, in some instances, Dunna has led projects that have been terminated with a change in leadership from major donors or in changes of parties forming government or due to changes to government departments. In that sense, an ever-evolving political climate and polarizing views around the peace process can greatly affect projects and
With that said, it is important to acknowledge that power dynamics are still inevitably embedded in the research processes and programming within Dunna. On the one hand, Dunna is a self-sustaining Colombian-led NGO that employs and works with Colombians toward goals of social cohesion and peace. The organization is made up of people who have in one form or another experienced the longstanding conflict in the country as a citizen through various stages of insecurity and war. On the other hand, many members of the staff also embody a lot of social privilege within Colombia, having obtained professional degrees, higher education, and fluency in English. Furthermore, they are highly trained in social research and in Satyananda yoga and/or trauma-sensitive yoga, which makes them a type of outside expert in many of the communities they serve—some of which have never before been introduced to yoga. As such, the lines between local knowledge and “expert knowledge” can intersect and intertwine (Mulligan and Nadarajah 2008, 83). In many respects, I also entered this context framed as an outside expert with certain privileges and (sometimes unconscious) biases informed by my own life experiences and social privilege of being born in the Global North, yet with very different class privilege than some of my Colombian colleagues. As such, I went into the research data collection phase in Bogotá without a set goal pertaining to the number of interviews I would conduct and only had a rough sketch of organizations I hoped to connect with, accompanied by the aim to let this build organically and change as necessary. The focus instead was placed on the learning process, relationship-building with Dunna, and completing interviews with the consent of all parties and where all necessary measures could be taken collaboratively (e.g., by having translators present, respecting the previous trust that had been built with interviewees, and an approval of interview questions for each interviewee).

In some cases, this meant changing plans on the spot, skipping questions or interviews altogether, based on what was happening in the programs. For example, we had travelled to Tunja to interview youth in a detention centre who were completing a comprehensive several-month training to become yoga instructors. Our first trip to Tunja was scheduled based on Dunna’s staff members’ schedules and around the travel of yoga instructor, their ability to be sustainable, not unlike many other NGO’s that rely on donors and grants (María Adelaida López interview 2018).
Ignacio Zuleta, who flew in from Cali (Colombia), and drove with us from Bogotá to Tunja. Zuleta was scheduled for a day-long training with the youth who were involved in Dunna’s training. This visit overlapped with a family day celebration, a rare day where parents and siblings came to visit with the youth, some having journeyed for several days to reach the centre. As such, the atmosphere of the centre was also not routine, since the youth were not in uniform, but in their favorite clothing. Music was being played over the speakers of the detention centre grounds and family members were arriving throughout the day with food and supplies for their children. The youth were set to attend a dinner and fiesta (dance) along with their parents and siblings, making for excitable energy and a lot of activity in the compound. Given the atmosphere, it was not possible to speak to as many of the youth as we had initially hoped. Further, we did not want to risk coopting space during meaningful personal time for the participants, recognizing their needs and this unique opportunity for them as preceding the research project.

Instead, we took the opportunity to interview staff at the detention centre, as well as Dunna’s staff and yoga instructors. The second visit we made to Tunja was just before the Christmas holiday and took place on the final day of the yoga teacher training. The final lessons were taught, and certificates were handed out. We had scheduled interviews following the ceremony, but things wrapped up sooner than expected due to holiday festivities and family visits, and it was not an ideal time or setting to interview anyone. Instead, I made use of informal conversations and experiences, in the nearby tourist town of Villa de Leyva, where I stayed for a few days during this trip to Tunja. Although scheduled interviews did not take place and no ‘formal’ research happened, this trip was as much a part of the learning process as any other. This flexibility and ability to adapt to circumstances, take decisions collaboratively, and ‘read the room’ in interview contexts was a critical part of how this project was designed and implemented.

In considering intersectionality, I began the framing of my project around the limitations of research, even with a feminist lens, as well as a critical view of the international aid industry. In my research framework, plans, and outputs, I sought to go beyond binaric and reductive understandings of the world and look to the intersecting realities of identities that are impacting the lived experiences of those I was interviewing. In some cases, my intended
interview questions included questions on topics such as ethnicity, race, gender, and class, but only in situations where the interview time and context allowed, which can be a possible methodological shortcoming if the project were to claim to be an intersectional analysis at its core. In praxis, I reserved these questions for Dunna’s staff and yoga teachers because we had a high level of rapport and the one-on-one privacy and time to do long interviews. In several instances, I spent full days with Dunna’s yoga teachers, observing or participating in their classes, driving to and from program sites together, and sharing meals and many informal conversations. This rapport allowed me to go deeper into questions about indigeneity, race relations, and gender constructs, and how they played out in Dunna’s work. Every interview was different from the next and, in several cases, I had added questions on the spot or omitted some in response to the verbal and non-verbal feedback I received from interviewees. As a result, I had only a blueprint in mind and set interview questions in front of me. In practice, however, the outcomes were varied. I believe this speaks to some of the challenges in applying theoretical concepts in the research procedures themselves. McCall succinctly explains how intersectionality as a major theoretical paradigm has introduced new methodological problems due to the complexities that arise “when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis,” which, in a nutshell, confers that “research practice mirrors the complexity of social life, calling up unique methodological demands” (2005, 1771).

I found it was important not only to understand the complex intersections of identities and power relations in the context in which the research takes place (e.g., historical legacies of colonization, deep understanding of the community in which you interview), but also the ways in which the situatedness of the researcher(s) and associated power dynamics in such a process. For example, my own social location is not divorced from my analysis, my relationship to Dunna, and the perceptions and the weight of my whiteness in all of my interactions in Colombia, whether intended or unintended, acknowledged, or overlooked.
In his reflections on ‘colorblind intersectionality,’ Carbado and Gulati explain how whiteness is often doing racially constitutive work, but often remains “unarticulated and racially invisible as an intersectional subject position” which dangerously allows whiteness to be the natural norm that legitimizes “a broader epistemic universe in which the racial presence, racial difference, and racial particularity of white people travel invisibly and undisturbed as race-neutral” (2013, 823).

In an attempt to (imperfectly) apply these concepts in praxis, I consciously sought to interview a wide range of people from various social locations. Although it was important to speak to subject-matter experts such as community and non-profit leaders and academics, who specialize in peacebuilding or yoga, it was equally important to hear from Dunna’s staff, yoga teachers, and program facilitators, and participants, situating them as the experts and leaders within their field. In many respects, they are the leading creators of knowledge in this field of research and are sharing this globally within their research and praxis area and that framing was really important for me as a researcher.

It was also critical to centre Dunna’s participants, many of whom live on the margins of society and whose voices may not always be included in the design of projects and programs that intend benefit them (e.g., demobilization or social programs in post-conflict, led by non-profit or government). In this research project in particular, this included people living in at-risk socio-economic realities, women, survivors of physical and sexual violence, youth, and incarcerated persons. Dunna’s research and programs in general are intended to reach Colombia’s most vulnerable populations. I would also argue that although Dunna engages in intersectional analysis in their program design and day-to-day work (e.g., in how they consider modern-day impacts and intersections of colonization and imperialism, complex race, and class relations in Colombia, in addition to the need to consider gendered vulnerabilities and the complexities of violent masculinity), I was not

14 Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati define colorblind intersectionality as “instances in which whiteness helps to produce and is part of a cognizable social category but is invisible or unarticulated as an intersectional subject position” (2013, 817). It is also important to flag, that although Carbado and Gulati offer their readers a useful conceptualization, critical and feminist disability scholars would also ask us to consider the ableist implications of even comfortably familiar social justice terms like colorblind. This metaphor is not (just) about the physical act of not seeing, it stands in for ignorance.
always able to reflect this in my interviews and, in hindsight, my analysis lacks in this regard. My interviews directly with participants were sometimes conducted in busy areas or in group settings and did not allow for more detailed conversations. In some cases, too, I had hoped to conduct more interviews with certain populations (e.g., more Afro-Caribbean participants), but did not manage to do so due to program cancellations/delays and travel constrains.

4.5.3 Researcher positionality, reflexivity and embodied research

Feminist research ethics and methods invite us to be reflexive and lend attention to the material, embodied, and relational conditions of the research process, which add to the complexities of community-based, qualitative research (Del Busso 2007). It is common in more positivistic examples of research to ‘hide’ the researcher as means of being more ‘objective,’ but feminist methodology invites the possibility for the researcher to be integrated in their research and in closer self-reflexive dialogue with the research process. It is crucial to recognize the implications of our own thinking and interactions with the research itself and with its participants by “not merely acknowledging, but making central our embodied participation in the process of research” (Brown, Cromby, Johnson, and Reavey 2011). Researcher reflexivity, then, requires reflecting on power dynamics, relationships, and unpacking the contingencies of knowledge and considering what brings us to our research questions, spaces, and places. This also entails engaging with why and how interviewees and research partners are implicated in the research process and what this relational layer of research can look like (Del Busso, 2007).

Sara Ahmed states that internal critique is a practical and theoretical necessity to really understand our position to our research and how the structures we work in and the tools we use may can be complex and multifaceted (2000). For example, it is important for me as a feminist scholar to consider how I present my research, how to balance academic relevance and reliance on theory and current popular discourses, while also presenting the data in a way that is accessible, relevant, and beneficial to those with whom I seek to work in partnership. From my social location as a junior scholar and a Ph.D. candidate from a global north-based institution, it is critical to ask what it means to engage in feminist research on
‘global’ issues considering postcolonial critiques on international research and work. My research project exists within complex intricacies that precede me and that I am integrated within on basis of my own geographies of knowing and being in the world.

My intention as a researcher to engage with this project in a way that would make space to not only do the research, but also to reflect on its limitations and challenges through ongoing conversations and self-reflection on topics such as privilege and power. I have sought to do this throughout the research fellowship in praxis and also through the pages of this work, reflecting on my own positionality as an individual, a feminist researcher, and a team member with Dunna. Based on what I have learned about feminist research and also elicitive peace work, it was important to continue to engage reflexively with my own experiences and choices throughout the research process that are framed through my own lived experiences (e.g., my status as a graduate student and someone who does research). Truly locating oneself in research goes beyond surface reaction to findings or a justification of why you are qualified to undertake the research. Rather, it asks us to connect these reflections to the research process very thoughtfully in thinking of how our own privileges, dispositions, and identities are shaped by and inform our research (Sylvester et al, 2011).

I have sought to explore relationality as a concept and aim to include thoughts on research as an embodied process, reflecting on the deeply personal and also relational nature of working collaboratively with research partners and interviewees. Integrating this very human aspect of research (an element of research that is sometimes frowned upon or seen as counter to objective and rigorous ‘academic’ research) derives from my theoretical engagements with feminist theories, but also transrational peace philosophy and elicitive peacework outlined at length in Chapter 2. In this understanding of research, interviewees are not framed as ‘subjects’ to be ‘studied,’ but, rather, are agential participants engaged in a relational process that continually evolves and takes shape with input from all actors, with the researcher taking on the role of ‘facilitator’ “whose task it is to hold an open space for the participants’ voices and insights to emerge and secondly, the aware and respectful treatment of those voices in the elaboration of the research findings” (Koppensteiner 2018, 66). The positionality of the researcher(s) and participant(s) alike are complex and multifaceted, which each party taking on multiple intersecting identities and social
locations (Shinozaki 2012, 1810-1811). As such, identity transcends beyond blanket markers of nationalism alone (i.e., interviewees are Colombian and I am Canadian) and integrates instead complex layers related to gender, race, class etc. which may take on more dominant meanings in the lives of participants or intersect to create complex and varying social locations (Shinozaki 2012, 1811). While there are inherent power dynamics at hand with research, seeing these dimensions in all of their complexities, beyond limiting binaries, can be useful is understanding and perhaps even restructuring the researcher-participant power relationship as, “boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not static but, rather, they are constituted in a situational manner” (Shinozaki 2021, 1811).

Norbert Koppensteiner explains that “we can only know our topics within Peace Studies and each other to the extent to which we are prepared to know ourselves” and that deeply engaging in research involves embracing it as an authentic encounter—as it equally requires openness and vulnerability from those involved (2018, 77). In research fields involving complex topics such as violence and trauma, carrying out interviews often means asking a great deal of vulnerability from interviewees, which is not always met with the same openness from the researcher on the topic or on the research process. These subject areas also require nuance beyond the moral and modern frames of thinking of right and wrong, good and bad, allowing for a multiplicity of understandings and experiences to co-exist empathetically (Koppensteiner 2018, 69). As such, research is more than just the moral framing of ethical standards and critical thinking but is an embodied experience that involves the researcher as much as participants/interviewees.

This extends beyond our critical reflections of who we are in relation to others and to the world, but also incorporates what we bring to research spaces including the intrapersonal (in addition to interpersonal) aspects of being. This can include our own family histories, our mental/physical health, our spirituality—our lived experiences that we inevitably carry with us and that are part of how we show up in the world and in our research (Koppensteiner 2018, 65). Whether intended or not, we influence and shape research data and interview settings, simply by showing up as who we are. As such, research is experimental and is “more than the dry and distanced gathering of knowledge or the critical examination of one’s own biases and imbalances” (Koppensteiner 2018, 60). Research, then, is an
embodied process, much like yoga, engaging all aspects of ourselves as researchers and those we are working with, not simply as a process of producing information (Koppensteiner 2018, 60). As much as the researcher is in a position of facilitator, the research process is a space of learning and transformation, beyond ‘knowing’ and cognition alone, but involving the body and a somatic or phenomenological understanding of being (Koppensteiner 2018, 68-69).

In terms of my own positionality, I come to this work and with this approach, in part, derived from personal experiences working in peacebuilding in fields such as education, development, and the non-profit sector. My coming to, and relationship to, this work is shaped by my scholarly engagements in these fields at both undergraduate and graduate levels. These experiences began when I was young and naïve, with a desire to better understand the world and be part of making it more equitable. Coming from a rural and economically disadvantaged region of Canada, I witnessed a lot of inequality in my community, largely based on gender, race, class, and language. In particular, I witnessed deep-seated racism towards Indigenous members (particularly residents of Listuguj First Nation and Eel River Bar First Nation) of my community of Restigouche, the traditional unceded land of the Mi’kmaq people. My home community struggles with the complex realities of rural poverty, lack of access to essential services, including reproductive rights, divisions based on culture and language, and instability due to rapid deindustrialization as a pulp-mill region. My childhood and experiences I had growing up there sparked my interest in social inequality, which led to undergraduate studies in Sociology and Psychology. I was eager to expose myself to multiple perspectives and started to re-evaluate narratives I had been taught surrounding my identity (e.g., sexuality, gender, nationality). That period of my life was also when I travelled geographically outside of my own context and began learning about injustice, particularly through a gender-based lens. In some cases, this meant engaging in complicated politics of the aid and development industry, with good intentions, but a lack of the skills and knowledge to navigate these spaces critically. I largely began this journey through my involvement in ‘international’ volunteer and internship programs, ranging from two-week reading week projects to a year spent in Malawi. Reflecting back, I did not always have the language to fully articulate some of the
problematic elements of this sector that I was witnessing and was implicated in, often feeling overwhelmed and disillusioned.

My Master’s-level education at both the University for Peace in Costa Rica and The University of Innsbruck, Austria helped me begin to craft a more nuanced understanding of the ‘helping’ industry, especially involving north-based non-profit and government intervention in spaces in the global south. My time spent in Austria, in particular, really challenged me not only to analyze these spaces critically as a researcher, but also on a deeply personal level. It enabled me to question my relationship to spaces, organizations, and people and understand more deeply my own motivations, biases, traumas, and lived experiences, that I inevitably carry with me.

Similar to the call by feminist researchers to unpack the notion of the neutral observer/researcher, elicitive conflict transformation incorporates the understanding that a peace worker (or researcher) is involved in and influences a conflict (or research setting) and its underlying relational patterns, simply by being present. This framework of understanding calls for a holistic understanding of social issues—not as separate from how they manifest on personal and interpersonal levels. The relational and affective dimensions of peace work have deeply shaped this project as well as my own understanding of my role as researcher and peace worker. This applies in my experiences leading to pursuing this program, choosing this topic and, of course, in my time spent working closely with Dunna.

In addition to reflecting on my relationship to peace studies and work and the experiences in my earlier years of life that led me on this path, I have had a similar non-linear series of reflections surrounding the practice of yoga and the two are not separate. Like many, (particularly in a Global North context) I was introduced to yoga as an interesting fitness regimen. I immediately enjoyed the practice as it shared similar movements and sensory elements to dance and skating, two very impactful outlets of coping and stress-management throughout my childhood. I came to the practice of yoga largely uncritically and unattuned to the power dynamics and politics of what I was consuming. I had also largely known yoga on a superficial level, focused on āsana and fitness, until I began dealing with a complex series of personal struggles, including injury and illness, throughout my doctoral
studies. Having signed up for a student yoga package in my neighborhood a few months before acquiring a mild traumatic brain injury/concussion, yoga became a really critical outlet for me on my healing journey. At the time, I had not studied yoga’s benefits but then felt them for myself firsthand—which then prompted my scholastic curiosity in the practice and my yearning to share in journeys of individual and collective healing. This personal experience led me to begin searching for examples of where yoga overlapped with the field of peace and to seek out feminist reflections on the complexities of the practice. I found applications of many of the concepts I was learning throughout my doctoral coursework such as discussions on cultural appropriation, neoliberal healthism, and how yoga can and has included/excluded certain bodies and communities for centuries. I found on-the-ground examples around the world of yoga being engaged in creative ways as a tool for activism, social justice, peacebuilding, and trauma recovery. This sparked my interest to know more and learn directly from those doing this work. I also sought to know more about yoga, which led me to pursue a yoga teacher training program in Costa Rica that allowed me to dive into 200 hours of theory, philosophy, and history, as well as the many applied facets of yoga including meditation, yoga nīdra, and āsanas.

On a personal level, yoga became an outlet for doing my own inner peace work. Through engaging with yoga as part of a holistic recovery plan for persistent post-concussion syndrome, I found brief moments of refuge from persistent pain at a time when I was experiencing daily chronic pain, headaches and migraines, as well as feelings disconnected from my body through symptoms such as fatigue, dizziness, vertigo, as well as visual and speech disturbances due to the traumatic brain injury I experienced. Prior to this injury, I had worked extremely long hours and was overcommitted to academic and extracurricular activities. I did not know how to slow down and chased the next achievement, chronically unsatisfied, and living with symptoms of high-functioning anxiety. I was experiencing imposter syndrome and lived in cycles of constant fear and stress, struggling to conform to the highly competitive nature of North American academia. Being forced to slow down so

15 There is an emergence of new feminist conversations in yoga as evidenced in new publications like the Race and Yoga journal and the edited collection Yoga, The Body and Embodied Social Change: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis (Berila et al. 2016), which are cited throughout this research project.
abruptly opened up the space to reconnect with myself and re-evaluate what would come next in my life. These life circumstances changed my academic trajectory and enabled me to find the courage to pursue a project I was passionate and curious about; one that was grounded in principles of community and connection. This process grounded me again in the work of elicitive peacebuilding and a deeper understanding of how the principles of transrational peace manifest as a peace worker and researcher. These factors led me to seek out research partners and ultimately led me to this collaborative work with Dunna.

While working with Dunna, I learned first-hand about their interpretation of yoga, which is one that is trauma-informed and rooted in the Satyananda tradition. In addition to observing and participating in Dunna yoga classes, I attended classes alongside María Adelaida López of Dunna at the Academia de Yoga Satyananda in Bogotá. The classes were longer in length than I was accustomed to and there was a big focus on comfort from padded mats of the floor, low lighting, and the suggestion to wear loose comfortable clothes. The classes I attended involved some light movement and were heavily focused on yoga nīdra or guided meditation, breathing techniques, and rest. This approach to yoga was simplistic yet deeply restorative: attuned to the inner world and not the physical body alone. Through interviews with Dunna, I met many people who had come to yoga due to a health ailment, life stressor, or simply just seeking relaxation or exercise, but stayed for much more. It became increasingly evident through the interviews that yoga was changing lives, in ways big and small, offering participants new perspectives and outlets of coping and healing.

Following my time in Bogotá, two days after landing back in Canada, I was involved in a serious highway car accident. This was the start of another phase of my healing process, one where I was able to go even deeper and apply what I had learned in Colombia first-hand. The accident resulted in conditions including whiplash, concussion, occipital neuralgia, disturbed sleep, restlessness, panic attacks, and chronic full-body pain. This period also marked a 16-month medical leave from the doctoral program, which has impacted the trajectory of this research project and should be noted as a significant interruption that delayed the final stages of the dissertation. Since that time, I have begun to build up a yoga practice again—focused on intentional movement, mindfulness,
gratitude, meditation, and restorative postures—and have learned about the role of the nervous system in pain recovery and the intricate links between the mind and body. These life experiences greatly impacted my doctoral studies, my research trajectory, as well as my understandings of the role of yoga as embodied feminist praxis and tool of elicitive peacebuilding. In this sense, my life history as a researcher intersects with and influences my research and vice versa.

4.6 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has introduced the context and details of the case study component to this dissertation. It introduces Dunna, explaining our initial contact, the building of our research partnership, and comments on much of the work we carried out together during my research fellowship. The experiences detailed throughout this chapter explain the framing of the project and how it has shaped and changed in response to a complex interplay of factors. This chapter speaks to the logistics of the project such as what methods I chose, my use of Quirkos, and the feminist ethics I sought to adhere to throughout the project.

I have discussed my motivations, challenges and reflections, while speaking to the messiness of researcher subjectivity and the challenges of working collectively in ways that acknowledge and celebrate different identities and worldviews. This chapter has aimed to speak to the multiple layers of a research process as well as the contradictions and questions that arise, even when careful preparation is a priority. Neither the research process nor its outputs have been perfectly implemented, but instead have aimed to evoke learning and a deeper commitment to research ethics, vulnerability, and self-reflection throughout the research process. Ultimately, I made decisions and negotiations throughout this process in favor of relationship building rather than research outputs alone which in and of itself has complexities. Additionally, this framing of the project did not erase power dynamics, misunderstandings, or the limitations of academic research. The reflections and concerns raised throughout this chapter continue to evolve and I will dialogue with them in the chapters that follow.
Chapter 5

5 Colombian case study: History, creative peace work and stories of resilience and resistance

A pregnant woman expressed her reluctance to bring a child into wartime, explaining how she is 43 and had waited a long time to decide to have a baby or not. The signing of the peace accord put her plans in motion, leaving her with the feeling that though things may still be difficult going forward she could possibly bring her child into a better reality than the one she knew.

A woman found yoga while struggling with severe chronic pain following an injury. Through yoga she was able to complete her physiotherapy sessions and pursue a self-directed program at home, coupled with her yoga training, giving her hope for her complex recovery from complex trauma(s).

A 15-year-old boy sat outside the youth detention center’s dining hall and asked me questions about snow and hockey. He told me about his yoga training and how he wanted to teach yoga one day and help others heal.

A young woman told me that for her, growing up in Bogotá in an affluent family meant, for the most part, a protection from active conflict but not from underlying feelings of unsafety and hypervigilance of what could happen. Still, she voted ‘yes’ for peace feeling this was the only way forward for the next generation. Her grandparents voted ‘no,’ scarred by memories and a need for more justice.

These are fragments of some of the many formal and informal conversations I had during my research fellowship in Colombia. With friends, colleagues, strangers, and interviewees, I was part of discussions surrounding social inequality and justice and what it means to be transitioning to peace. We discussed hopes and fears, the past and the future. This dissertation draws on these conversations to frame the historical and current below, contextualized by relevant media and secondary research. The inclusion of storytelling and
personal accounts of historical and present events aims to complement news media and academic research available in English and also adds nuance to the topic—transcending moral opposites and offering multiple dialogues, memories and perspectives (National Centre for Historical Memory 2016, 20-22). Moreover, this choice echoes the citizen and victim-centered framework of the BASTA YA! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity report, a collaborative report coordinated by the National Center for Historical Memory in Colombia (National Center for Historical Memory 2016; Díaz Pabón 2018, 16). The approach of the National Center for Historical Memory is one that centralizes the importance of recognizing memory in this diversity while contextualizing beyond specific incidences of violence themselves (National Center for Historical Memory 2016). Their approach calls for an understanding that “violence falls within the context of the interweaving of exclusion, impunity, plundering and terror, which have configured the daily happenings of [Colombia],” giving “an account of both the huge magnitude reached by the war and the social and political fabric that produces the war and that feeds it back” (National Center for Historical Memory 2016, 16).

This dissertation, thus far, has provided an overview of the key literature related to peace work and yoga, of the collaborative project with Dunna, including the key research questions we sought to better understand. Yet, many questions remain: Why the case study of Colombia? Why was yoga, an ancient practice originating in Asia, useful in a Latin American conflict zone in the first place? Why has Dunna’s work had such a far-reaching impact across a wide variety of cultures, socio-economic stratas1 and regions in Colombia? To delve into these questions, it is imperative to offer more background on the Colombian case study including the historical reality that led up to the interview period and the social

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1 The term strata is used in Colombia to signal social class distinction. One’s strata is made up based on a complex array of factors including (but not limited to) family history, educational attainment and race, lumping those with similar socio-economic traits into one strata, for a total of six (ranked from low to high). The initial intention was to identify lower income homes or communities (based on characteristics such has quality of neighborhood, size of home, amount of green space) within a region with the aim to provide subsidies to them as a means of equalization. However, the cultural understandings surrounding strata run much deeper than property value and influence one’s upward mobility in Colombian society greatly. Strata 6 for example is synonymous with hired household staff, elite local or international education and whiteness. Though there have been many efforts to equalize such as scholarships for stratas 1-3 to attend elite universities, much inequality persists (Bushnell and Hudson 2010).
and political contexts at the time that framed the interviews. Colombia’s history and path to peace has been complex and multifaceted. As such, the following sections offers a brief overview of key historical events, insights from interviewee’s lived experiences including their impressions of the peace process and lastly, an introduction to creative solutions for peace around the country. This will pave the way for a more thorough discussion of yoga and peacebuilding in Chapter 6.

5.1 Historical overview

The beginning of violence and inequality in Colombia does not have a clear start date, and long predates the formation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Spanish: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC) (Steele 2017, 58; Quiñones interview 2018; Orjuela Garcia interview 2018; Rondón interview 2018). A topic that was frequently raised during my stay in Colombia was how complex the makeup of violence was and how deeply-rooted it still is, transcending the armed conflict with the FARC alone. For example, Alfonso Reyes, the Dean of Engineering of the Universidad de los Andes, the keynote speaker at a conference I attended in Bogotá, entitled Build Peace, explained how, contrary to popular belief, the largest subset of the violence in Colombia is organized criminal violence, largely in Colombia’s cities and not the violence of the armed conflict(s) and is closely followed by family violence.

Fabio Andrés Díaz Pabón, a Colombian Political Scientist, explains that “to understand the coexistence of peace initiatives and the active pursuit of violence in Colombia, we need to understand the violence beyond the broad narrative that the Colombian armed conflict is essentially a fight between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the Colombian state” (Díaz Pabón, 2018, 30). Violence then, can be understood in this context as widespread and multifaceted, affecting many dimensions of Colombian society. It is also critical to note that the violence also dates to

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2 During my time in Bogotá, I attended the international conference Build Peace at Universidad de los Andes. 350 participants from 40 countries met to discuss new avenues for citizen participation in peace agreements. 3 A Spanish version of the keynote address, along with all other conference talks can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwQ90vctAzI&t=146s
long before the conflict with the FARC began (Steele 2017, 58-59). Dunna Research Assistant Alejandra Orjuela Garcia explained this reality in her own words: “I’m not going to say that Colombians are violent, but I guess it’s a society that has got used to violence. I don’t know if you have turned on the news, but it’s violence, violence, violence, so I think we have normalized that” (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). The narrative that Orjuela Garcia describes maps on to other historical accounts of the complexities of the Colombia conflict which narrate the conflict as complex, long-lasting and pre-dating the FARC (Steele 2017, 58; Pérez Espitia and Melamed 2017, 136). She said, “the violence in Colombia is bigger than just the formal conflict” with the FARC, army, other guerillas and paramilitaries and is an ingrained part of what she called the ‘cotidinidad’ which means the ‘everydayness’—in the interactions and lived experience of Colombia in all walks of life and geographic location (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). For example, the formal conflict between the FARC and the Colombian Government is interwoven with issues such as agrarian struggle, illegal crops and drug trade, peace agreements with various groups, violence and activity from other actors such as other guerilla groups (left-wing) such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) (or the National Liberation Army), or paramilitary groups (right wing) such as the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) (or the United Self-Defences of Colombia). Other organizations involved in illicit activity but do not self-identify as paramilitaries or guerillas such as the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) (or the Clan del Golfo) are also implicated, making for a complex array of actors with different goals and motivations (Díaz Pabón 2018. 30).

Dunna Co-Founder and Research Director Natalia Quiñones also noted that a general perception amongst Colombian society is that violence dates back as far as colonial times—as early as the start of the 16th century (roughly the year 1525), when numerous violent crimes were committed, in particular towards African-Colombians and indigenous groups who resisted Spanish colonizers (Quiñones interview 2018; Bailey 1967, 571). Sheila Gruner explains that marginalized groups in Colombia have “lived with the consequences of violence, displacement, systematic discrimination based on race, the ecological destruction of lands, and political and cultural erasure throughout Colombian history, from the onset of colonialization and the brutality of the slave trade” (2017, 175).
The key event, often claimed as the start of modern violence in Colombia, is the Guerra de los Mil Días (War of the Thousand Days) that took place between 1899-1902 (Mazzuca and Robinson 2016, 4). An economic crisis fueled by a global drop in coffee prices paved way for the conflict to begin, which was compounded by the political exclusion felt by the country’s liberal party (Diaz Caceres 2018, 40). Both parties saw “this conflict as a war of restoration: liberals wanted to restore their political rights and the conservatives wanted to restore order” (Diaz Caceres 2018, 40). During this three-year period, approximately 200,000 people died in the civil war and liberal and conservative-identifying Colombians became further polarized (Quiñones interview 2018; BBC News 2018; Thomson 2011, 335). The conflict was international, spilling into Ecuador, Venezuela and Nicaragua, with involvement from the United States and Panama (Demarest 2001, 3, 22).

Nearly half a decade later, on April 9, 1948, President Jorge Eliécer Gaitan was assassinated. Following this, a 10-hour outbreak of riots, called El Bogotázo (the Bogota Riots), occurred, leaving much of downtown Bogotá destroyed (BBC News 2018; Steele 2017, 58). This incident is thought to be a key cause of the subsequent civil war that killed 250,000-300,000 people—a period in Colombian history known as La Violencia—a ten-year civil war between conservative and liberal political parties (BBC News 2018; Leech 2009, 242; and Steele 2017, 58). Fought mainly in the countryside in the Andean coffee-producing regions, this conflict further entrenched inequalities and resulted in mass displacement of roughly 2 million people and the loss of land (Thomson 2011, 335). During La Violencia, the “rural civilian population became highly involved both as actors and victims, and entire peasant families on both sides were massacred and displaced. La Violencia created memories of hate, spirals of vengeance and a generalized mistrust in new generations of the rural population” (Meertens and Zambrano 2010, 191).

This bipartisan violence ended in 1958 when an agreement called the National Front, a power-sharing deal between liberal and conservative parties, was negotiated (Quiñones interview 2018; BBC News 2018; Bushnell 1993, 223). Through the National Front, violence did decrease broadly, but it did not guarantee the safety of citizens or allow new political parties to enter the system. In addition, it overlooked “the violence to which some of the demobilized liberal guerrillas were subjected, which led to the belief that the state
would not honour agreements and the promise of peace for former fighters, and that peace would not be warranted by the state” (Díaz Pabón 2018, 19). This fragility, against the backdrop of the Cold War, led to the social and political conditions where armed groups like the FARC were born.

These key historical periods were marked with inequality amongst groups of Colombians, largely by class, which was further confounded by the arrival of major multinational companies in oil and other natural resource exports which added to the unequal distribution of resources, civil unrest and conflict (Quiñones interview 2018; Brittain 2010, 38). Frances Thomson explains that to claim that the conflict in Colombia poses the greatest threat to the country’s development fails to acknowledge the longstanding agrarian, rural struggles that arise from capitalist development itself (2011, 351-352). Growth and development, specifically in a top-down manner, can in and of themselves fuel inequality and poverty, and may be imposed through violent means, further adding to the complexities and layers violence (Thomson 2011, 352). Raul Collazos Ardila, a teacher and representative of Red Colombiana de Actoría Social Juvenil of Popayán Colombia (Colombian Network of Youth Social Actors of Popayán) echoes this in stating that the conflict in Colombia is complex with multiple and intersecting conflicts, including—“social, political, environmental and armed conflicts” (Collazos Ardila interview 2017).

5.1.1  FARC conflict

Paramilitary groups were legitimized (1964-1968) as part of a counterinsurgency plan under the direction of specialists from the United States to regain control of peasant resistance communities (in the regions of Cauca, Huila and Tolima) during La Violencia (Thomson 2011, 336). These militarized attacks caused some communities to disperse, with some individuals forming what we know today as the FARC (Thomson 2011, 336). Founded in 1964, and ultimately putting down arms in 2016, the FARC was in large part created in response to longstanding inequality, structural violence, and imperialism and sought to represent the interests of marginalized rural Colombia with anti-imperialist values (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). The FARC guerillas followed a Marxist-Leninist ideology and was founded by farmers and land
workers to advocate for the interests of rural Colombians following the Colombian Civil war from 1948-1958 (BBC 2016a; Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). Though many agree on the relevance of communism in the FARC’s inception, economic and power-driven motivations, rather than ideological affinity with Marxist views alone, are the main driving forces of the organization and are relevant to understanding the FARC’s origins and motives (Ugarizza and Craig 2012, 453).

At its height, the organization included 18,000 individuals and “recruited heavily among rural poor populations and in indigenous communities, eventually recruiting more women and children than any other armed group in the country.” The organization took stances such as pro-women’s rights and LGBTQ rights in Colombia (Henshaw 2020, 6). The FARC financed itself through involvement in illegal gold mining, the drug trade including cocaine trafficking, and the organized kidnappings of political figures or other elites for ransom and extortion (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). It used this money to mobilize itself and pay for supplies, but also to pay for the social services of its members—an attractive recruitment benefit for new members seeking to get out of poverty in the countryside (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). Several other guerilla groups were also formed in response to this reality, including the Leftist National Army (ELN) and Maoist People’s Liberation Army (EPL) in 1964 (BBC News 2018). The formation of other groups such as the National People’s Alliance in 1970 (a leftist counterweight to the National Front) and the M-19 guerilla group in 1971 followed (BBC News 2018).

In 1984, the FARC and the government began a year-long truce together following negotiations. Ultimately, that truce did not end in a permanent cessation of violence (Rothman 2016). During the period that followed (1984-1988), the FARC also launched its first political party, the Patriotic Union, winning several seats in the national parliament as well as 16 mayoral campaigns and 247 city council posts across the country (InSightCrime 2017). This was met with a strong reaction from paramilitary and drug trafficking groups and Patriotic Union members were targeted—and 3,000 were killed over a 6-year period (InSightCrime 2017). In some cases, innocent civilians were killed but their deaths were reported as FARC guerillas or as supporters; this continued into the 2000s (Cosoy 2015).
The FARC-inflicted violence was also met with protest (such as the No Más campaign). Following a stark growth of the organization to 18,000 in 1999, there were more than 3,000 FARC-orchestrated kidnappings and a homicide rate of 60 per 100,000 persons (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020).

Following this period, more peace negotiations and efforts began, including a United States CIA-backed multibillion-dollar military. The effectiveness of this operation has been debated about its ability to end guerilla fighting while others credit it for weakening the FARC’s presence over time (Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation 2020). Following the election of Uribe in 2002, who promised to crackdown on guerilla groups, the FARC’s power and numbers declined, as did the violence. He remained in office until 2010, at which point Juan Manual Santos was elected and began formal steps towards a peace process with the FARC. That process began in 2012 and took place in Havana, Cuba (Gligorevic 2015). The years that followed remained turbulent with several breaks in the negotiated ceasefire. A final agreement was reached in 2016.

At the time of writing, there are 8 million registered victims of the FARC conflict, all of whom have been directly affected, including family members who were murdered or kidnapped (Tapia Navarro 2019). 250,000 people were murdered during the conflict over 30 years, with 6.5 million people forcibly displaced from their land and homes (Rueda 2020, Steele 2017, Castro interview 2017). The majority of the registered victims of the conflict are women (del Pilar Correa Cortes 2020; Castro interview 2017). Two thirds of the violent deaths that occurred throughout this conflict were civilians, in part as a result of many massacres in battles to establish power and control over various regions across Colombia. Meertens and Zambrano explain that, “[guerilla and paramilitary groups] engaged in a bloody dispute over people, land, territory and resources. They rarely engaged in open confrontations, instead they mostly attacked the civilian population, which is equivalent to, as the old adage goes, draining the water in which the fish swim. The distinction between combatants and non-combatants became blurred, the number of displaced persons increased and both guerrillas and the paramilitary committed an endless chain of international humanitarian law and human rights violations” (2010, 193). As such the myriad of victims of the conflict are meant to be at the center of the peace process and
recipients of programming and justice focused reparations. Formal transitional justice mechanisms have been instituted, including a transitional justice tribunal, special search unit for disappeared victims, and truth commissions (Daly 2018, 659). Some FARC members have been tried through these outlets instead of the formal courts system, with reparations to the victims being issued rather than imprisonment (Ballesteros 2017).

5.1.2 Referendum ‘no’ vote

Against this historical landscape, and the outline of key facts and figures, the following pages discuss in more depth the 2016 peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. This is the main focal point of this dissertation, given the timeline of the project, with interviews having taken place between November 2017 and February 2018, which was the early stages of the peace agreement’s promises coming into effect. It is important to note that this dissertation represents a small snapshot in time, and the social and political views expressed by the participants in the project spoke largely to this particular fragment of Colombia’s history.

Peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government began in 2012, with a final agreement reached in 2016 (BBC 2016b). In 2016, a public referendum was held to answer the question: “Do you support the final accord to end the conflict and to construct a stable and lasting peace?” (NPR 2016). In this referendum, the accord was narrowly rejected when 50.2% voted against and 49.8% voted in favor (NPR 2016). There were several reasons for the ‘no’ vote, including heavy rains in the Caribbean region following a hurricane that made some roads impassable or difficult to navigate (Idler 2016). In other cases, the ‘no’ vote was prompted by a prominent rural/urban divide class stratification (Ferro interview 2017). She emphasized the reality that, in the referendum, this social inequality which is in part marked by a rural/urban divide is: “difficult because people who have less fear… they are the ones who decided those things, people that live in urban areas. But people who live in rural areas are more affected with the conflict, and yet we, the urbans we decided about it” (Ferro interview 2017).

She explained that in the referendum to decide the outcome of the peace process on October 2, 2016 the votes were largely urban in the “no” vote, which she felt were votes by those
disconnected from the immediate impacts of the ongoing conflict (Ferro interview 2017). A lot of wealthier, urban-living and -educated Colombians who were largely removed from the active conflict voted on behalf of those in rural areas whose struggle they know little about. On the other hand, of 81 most-affected towns, 67 voted yes, which means that the majority of the “official” victims of the conflict wanted the peace agreement to be passed (Echavarría Alvarez interview 2017). One example of this is Chocó, a region with high FARC presence, where an estimated two thirds of the population are formally classified as victims of the conflict—the majority of whom identify as Afro-Colombian and Indigenous (Alsema 2019).

The referendum also coincided with a move to integrate sex education in schools, which resulted in targeted propaganda that conflated these two separate topics—the peace agreement and sex education—as one. More specifically, various agencies were hired by the Ministry of Education to create a handbook for the education system to address the cultural intolerance of sexual diversity in Colombia (Echavarría Alvarez interview 2017). Josefina Echavarría Alvarez, a Colombian peace studies scholar, explained it to me this way in an interview:4

Months before the referendum there was a big scandal in Colombia about a new handbook that was to be produced by the Ministry of Education and given to schools about sexual diversity… The handbook was a result of a decision by the Constitutional Court for the school environments to be much more respectful of sexual diversity because there were many different instances of violence in schools in Colombia (Echavarría Alvarez interview 2017).

Leaked early drafts of the handbook were highly criticized by the Church and by the Conservative Party, who advocated that the government was promoting a ‘gender ideology’ 5 that was dangerous and harmful to Colombian society. This narrative and fear

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4 I conducted this interview prior to my trip to Colombia to conduct interviews for the dissertation. The interview was conducted as part of my work as an Innsbruck peace studies alumnus and as Editor for the Many Peaces Magazine (MPM). The full interview can be found here and also in print version in MPM Vol.5 released in January 2017: https://magazine.manypeaces.org/2017/01/18/josefina-echavarria-alvarez-including-sexuality-and-gender-in-conflict-analysis/.
around the handbook being too liberal and scandalous (i.e. not solely abstinence only education and inclusive of various gender identities and sexual orientations) ultimately became interwoven with the peace process, which was characterized as being too lenient on criminals but also as paving the way for the country to move forward in ways that the Church and conservative movement looked down on, such as sexual liberation and gender diversity (Echavarria Alvarez interview 2017).

In general, a significant factor in the ‘no vote’ was the role of religious leaders. A large number of voters was persuaded to vote no because the yes vote was framed as too leftist and lenient, not only in the punishment of the FARC but in the type of future this could create. While in Bogotá, I interviewed Juan Diego Castro who was then a National Researcher at the Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Peace and Reconciliation Foundation), which he described as the equivalent of a research centre or civil society led think-tank (Castro interview 2017). In fact, the Fundación Paz y Reconciliación leads research on the various conflicts in Colombia, studying topics such as conflict dynamics, armed groups, urban security and illegal economies. Castro explained that many of Colombia’s political parties represent conservative views with many being religiously oriented in the Catholic faith (Castro interview 2017). Moreover, he explained that there has been a growth in support of Christian churches in Colombia, which are also understood in a Colombian context to be more conservative than other denominations, and they have had a huge influence on public opinion and voting trends (Castro interview 2017). Collazos Ardila added that: “the so-called post-truth was imposed in the country. Extreme right, mass

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6 The organization’s director, León Valencia Agudelo is a well-known political analyst in Colombia, and was a former commander in the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) or the National Liberation Army, a left-wing armed group in Colombia that is still active today. The organization began as a peacebuilding outlet to assist the transition to post-conflict in Colombia that would also work to include all of Colombia in their research process as an aim to be more inclusive and representative of diverse opinions not just of those working for peace that are centralized within major city centres (Castro interview 2017). Many of their researchers live in regions outside of Bogotá or other urban regions and are native to these rural and inaccessible parts of the country. This, Castro said sets the organization apart from many to ensure that grassroots information is being collected. Moreover, they work to ensure that their academically rigorous research is accessible to the public and they frequently disseminate with work through newspapers, radio and on television (Castro interview 2017). The organization has tracked the negotiations between the FARC and various governments over the last 6 years and explained how the conditions for a possible peace were in place this time, with all parties very committed to the process (Castro interview 2017).
media, big businessmen and religious cults, dedicated to repeat lies until the common people assumed them as truth, such is the case of the gender ideology” (Collazos Ardila interview 2017).

Moreover, Castro explained that although the “gender focus” was coopted and instrumentalized as part of the ‘no vote,’ the peace accord did have a gender focus in the sense that although it was not directly linked to the sexual education handbook, it was a narrative crafted by conservative and religious leaders to facilitate a fear-based response to the peace process (Castro interview 2017). The gender focus in the plebiscite instead was centered around the need to respond to the victims of the conflict, the majority of whom were women. He explained that Colombia has “roughly 8 million registered victims—that is, people who actually had a family member who was killed. [Colombia] had 250,000 murders during the conflict or related to the conflict in the past 30 years, and 6.5 million people who were forcefully displaced from the lands” (Castro interview 2017). The reasons for displacement are multifarious and include fear of forced recruitment to various groups, dispossession of land and belongings, extortion and threats from criminal groups to small businesses, farms and individuals, and fears of persecution, including based on gender and sexuality (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2019, 10-12).

5.1.3 Ratification and demobilization

After revising the agreement, the FARC and Colombian Government signed the peace agreement on November 24, 2016. They later sent it to Congress for ratification, which took place between November 29-30, 2016, instead of it being sent to a second public referendum (Partlow and Miroff, 2016). Many applauded this, while opponents of the peace accord felt it was rushed and had been pushed through without significant changes to the document (Casey 2016). Some felt the final version was still too lenient on the FARC and did not gain the approval of most of the ‘no’ voters (Casey 2016). The historic moment of the signing of the accord was commemorated in Cartagena where the FARC and government officials signed the document, witnessed by other world leaders, and President Santos was named a Nobel peace prize winner in the weeks to come—seen by many as a major milestone for Colombia (Casey 2016). 11,049 members of the FARC demobilized
with the signing of the peace accord. Of this figure, 77% were men and 22% were women (Carranza-Franco 2019, 12). 66% were from rural areas and 15% identified as rural-urban (Carranza-Franco 2019, 12). Of this group, 60% had not received any formal education and 77% of the demobilizing persons had no place to live—and the majority did not want to return to their areas of origin (Carranza-Franco 2019, 12).

Priorities of the accord include critical issues such as long-term reincorporation of demobilizing FARC members, reducing socio-economic divides, particularly between rural and urban Colombians, the rights of victims and focusing on gender and ethnicity (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2019). Monitoring by the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame showed progress on implementation yet stressed the risk of compromising achievements that had been made if steady progress is not continued and carried forward by governments to come (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies 2019).

The demobilization of the FARC, which was demobilized on promises of political representation as well as a safe reintegration into society, signaled the formation of their political party, the Revolutionary Alternative Force of the Common People (Human Rights Watch 2018; Grattan 2019). In some cases, FARC members attempting to reintegrate into society have been targeted with violence, and more than 137 had been killed since the signing of the peace accord (Grattan 2019). 7 In other cases, the demobilization of the FARC has created a power vacuum for other groups to take hold of previously FARC-controlled areas and has resulted in persisting violence (Klein 2017). Collazos Ardila said that although violence has reduced in Colombia, the sites left by the FARC guerillas have in some cases been co-opted by paramilitary groups and other crime outlets. Moreover, he explained that “there is great concern about the selective assassinations of demobilized FARC social and environmental leaders and ex-combatants” (Collazos Ardila interview 2017).

7 This figure was current as of September 2019.
When FARC combatants put down their weapons, conversations also surfaced surrounding urban crime and what it would mean to have those who had demobilized reintegrate as members of civil society. This also drew attention to the reality that there are other threats to public safety that exist outside of the FARC (Castro interview 2017). Castro explained that in his work at Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, the organization sought to draw attention to the fact that the FARC “were not the only cause or reason for the poverty, crime, corruption and terrorism in Colombia, and that there were other structures—mainly structures that were related to the former paramilitaries who created new armed groups and those armed organizations started operating in urban scenes a lot more after they demobilized” (Castro interview 2017). The crime rates in Colombia reflected this as well: most violence and murders has occurred in the cities, not in the rural guerilla-dominant areas, contrary to popular belief or the dominant narrative recounted in the media (Castro interview 2017). Juan Diego Castro explained: “last year, at the peak of the conflict we had around 16,000 murders in the country, and about 90% of those occurred in cities. They were completely outside the armed conflict. It was mainly because of coexistence between neighbors, because the justice system didn’t work… and so most of those murders occurred in cities and were completely outside of the conflict” (Castro interview 2017).

A rise in targeted killings of Indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and social activists has been on the rise in previously FARC-dominant areas as new guerilla, paramilitary or other groups rushed to fill the void left by the FARC (Klein 2017). This also resulted in forced displacement and loss of land for some signaling a continuation of injustice and oppression for Colombians, many of whom voted in favor of the peace agreement with the FARC (Klein 2017). Though the “the overall number of displacements and deaths linked to the conflict has substantially decreased since the unilateral and subsequent bilateral ceasefire agreements were reached between the FARC-EP and the Colombian army… the systematic and selective attacks on leftist, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous, and campesino leaders have led to deep concerns for the post accord period” (Gruner 2-17, 179).

Although Colombia has one of the most comprehensive frameworks on internal displacement, challenges in implementation persist, and just 10% of those displaced have received compensation (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2019, 6). A group of
FARC dissidents have rejected the terms of the peace agreement and continue to stay active, while others who previously demobilized have joined them in criticism surrounding demobilization and reintegration programs (Human Rights Watch 2018). They remain active along with groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2019, 7). Moreover, struggles persist in many of the areas formerly occupied by the FARC, such as the region of Chocó, where in 2019, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the “intensification of armed conflict victimized almost 188,000 people between January and September alone” (Alsema 2019). The ongoing crisis in Venezuela also plays a part and has led to the return of 300,000-500,000 Colombian migrants and refugees (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2019, 7).

5.2 Interviewee perspectives on peace

Those whom I interviewed, in large part, supported the peace process. Often, even those who thought it was imperfect or lacking felt it was the only way forward for peace. Yuseph Zapata, a graphic designer, expressed this in saying: “this is the beginning, it’s really in a basic form, and it’s not the best beginning, but it’s a good start for something bigger” (Zapata interview 2018). An architect in Bogotá, Rubén Combariza, agreed, advocating that it was “something that Colombia needed for a long time” and that every citizen needed to play a role in leading Colombia in the direction of peace (Combariza interview 2018). He explained that some citizens did not agree with the peace process itself or how the negotiations and referendum had been handled, but still, this should not dissuade the country off the path of peace. Combariza went on to express some of the complexities of this from his own location, saying that his father was a former military member and that he was cautious in his hope for peace (Combariza interview 2018). Combariza explained that “he doesn’t like a lot of the new laws that are being expected to make the process work, but he also thinks that it is something necessary, that we couldn't live longer with this kind of war. And I think, personally… I see a little bit more the hope in Colombia” (Combariza interview 2018). He explained that he believed that many of the younger generation supported the peace process and urges that youth have a critical role to play: “Our
generation, we were born in the middle of war, and we have never known another state but war in Colombia, so I think we have to learn to live in peace, and we are kind of a little afraid of what that looks like because we don't know what is going to happen, but we have to learn from that” (Combariza interview 2018).

Another interviewee, Andrea Sarmiento Bernal, the owner of a small advertising company, echoed this in explaining the contentions around the referendum and how, although a lot of people did not want the peace agreement signed as it was configured, they did want Colombia to move to peace in some form. She expressed this in saying, “everybody wants peace, the thing that is debated is: how are you going to get it?” (Sarmiento Bernal interview 2018). Sarmiento Bernal explained that she initially was critical of the peace process, having grown up hearing stories from family members when they lived in a region rife with conflict. These family members lost their homes and belongings. They remembered the violence and lived it intimately, leaving them with the feeling that there should be greater punishments for FARC perpetrators because of the harm caused and the lives they destroyed (Sarmiento Bernal interview 2018). She explained that it was the work of José Alberto “Pepe” Mujica, the President of Uruguay, and his support for the peace process, that changed her mind and persuaded her to vote ‘yes’ in the referendum and commit to the peace process. She explained that she ultimately felt the peace process was necessary to break the cycle of violence, expressing that, “the more you want this justice, the more pain is there going to be… all sides have made so much damage, that a thirst of justice is just going to make the war go on forever” (Sarmiento Bernal interview 2018). She felt that, “if we as Colombians keep on thinking that someone did something that was wrong, and they have to pay for it, or they need to be killed... or in jail... or something like that… the war was never going to stop” (Sarmiento Bernal interview 2018). She explained:

My grandparents did have to run away, and lost all their things because of the war, but not me... you know, in my life, I never saw any damage to my family or myself. So, what I was thinking is that if I was not able to forgive and let the war end, nobody was going to be able to. Because there are a bunch of people who lost their friends, lost their families, lost their parents... and they are the ones who were more able to forgive and make this war stop. So that changed my mind (interview 2018).

Conversely, one interviewee, Germán Castaño, an economist, also had family members who had been affected directly or indirectly by the armed conflict and felt he could not
support the peace process (Castaño interview 2018). He explained, “among my family and friends there have been cases of murder, kidnapping, extortion, and robbery. They have been victims of guerrilla groups of the left, right-wing paramilitaries, drug traffickers and criminal gangs” (Castaño interview 2018). He felt that because of this, many were against the peace process as it is difficult to forgive without achieving any formal justice, which he deemed essential to repairing the damage made by the FARC.

The majority of those whom I interviewed felt that the process gave a foundation upon which peace could be built, but that major structural changes would need to be made to see long-term peace in Colombia. Several discussed the stark class barriers and the difficulties for social mobility that persists for many. Orjuela Garcia explained that the mission of the FARC was rooted in class-based inequality, and that many of these divisions remain in Colombian society today, such as the clear class divides among the different parts of Bogotá—a very ingrained structural inequality that limits people to their social (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). “The classes are so demarcated… and the thing is that the mobility through classes is very hard. If you were born poor, you might stay poor, even though you work a lot and whatever you do... if you were born poor or you are in a jail in Tunja, or you are most likely poor all your life” (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). She explained how deeply rooted structural inequalities are in Colombia and how difficult this can be to change when power is in the hands of a few (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018).

Dunna yoga instructor Viviana Jaramillo concurred that there is great need in Colombia to work towards social and economic justice for all citizens, narrowing the gap of access to education and health services and moving away from a culture of violence and military-centric ideologies (Jaramillo interview 2017). She said:

I think it is a very complex process that needs to start by changing people’s minds. As long as we think that violence or military interventions will change our country peace cannot happen. Also, I think we need more opportunities in the countryside to stop men and women coming into the army as a way to have a better life (Jaramillo interview 2017).

On an individual level, she discussed how yoga can aid in this, as a tool to help people in thinking before reacting violently. She has witnessed yoga become a space that brings people with different histories, lived experiences and impressions of the peace process
together for a common practice (Jaramillo interview 2017). Though not a one-size-fits-all approach, nor the perfect solution to such complex social issues, practices like yoga can have their place in the peace process (Jaramillo interview 2017).

Camilla Villar Guhl of Colombia’s UNICEF office described how the intense polarization among Colombians remains a key barrier to peace. She explained that “many people who live in big cities are not as sensitive about the conflict and the war, they just saw it through television. But when you go to the small places, to the rural areas where the conflict was the worst, you can see how people really want to change things” (Villar Guhl interview 2018). Remedying the polarization requires addressing Colombia’s stark class divides which keep the poor poor and leaves a small percentage of the population wealthy (Villar Guhl interview 2018). Despite these concerns, Camilla felt optimistic about the peace process and feels as though it requires an understanding that “peace is something very complex, and very deep. We have to think about the environment, we have to think about poverty, we have to look for the structural causes to find a real and stable version of peace” (Villar Guhl interview 2018).

Carolina Rodas, a 5Rhythms instructor and university professor, echoed this in saying that simply signing a peace agreement would not mean an overnight end to violence or the effects of longstanding violence and that Colombia remains deeply polarized not only about the referendum vote for peace but on how said peace should be realized (Rodas interview 2017). Moreover, she expressed that reconciliation and bridges between polarized groups was happening largely in the rural areas where guerillas are returning home and

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8 Carolina Rodas, a 5Rhythms meditative movement instructor in Bogotá, has been involved in creative solutions for peace in Colombia, working directly with those most affected by the conflict. She also harnessed this creative energy into activism surrounding the peace process through an initiative called Paz Mov (Rodas interview 2017). Paz Mov was a dance demonstration in Bogotá that was created as a way to mobilize Colombians to dance for peace, and a way for individuals to cathartically express what they were feeling surrounding the peace process. She describes it a very politicized moment but one which she and the other dancers dealt with through a very different form of expression (Rodas interview 2017).

9 Developed by American Gabrielle Roth in the 1970s, 5Rhythms is a dynamic dance and movement practice that “ignites creativity, connection and community,” transcending meanings of ‘dance’ alone with its meditative properties (5Rhythms 2019). It applies a method by which its practitioners can creatively express emotions, aggression, anxieties or vulnerabilities, and can be described as “healing, exhilarating as well as deeply restorative” (5Rhythms 2019). For more on the 5Rhythms practice visit: https://www.5rhythms.com.
reintegrating into their communities again. In the cities, there was more of a disconnect from the lived experience of those who have lived the war in a more acute way (Rodas interview 2017). Castaño was also among many who suggested that the peace agreement with the FARC was not enough to create peace alone and that the underlying issues of inequality in society must be addressed simultaneously (Castaño interview 2018). Daniela Ferro, a recent political science graduate from el Universidad Nacional de Colombia (National University of Colombia), echoed this sentiment when she said, “I think that in Colombia there is a lot of privilege for a lot of people, and I think the base of the conflict is still there. It started with that, and it still is. There are people with a lot of money and political power… and they want to maintain that. So, there is a political conflict, and there’s a social conflict” (Ferro interview 2017).

I also spoke with Mónica Valdés Arcila, Communications Coordinator at the Bogotá-based organization Redprodepaz10—a national network that coordinates regional development and peacebuilding programs. Mónica described the peace process as one of the most ambitious goals of Colombia society (Valdés Arcila interview 2017). She said:

I am optimistic because the abandonment of arms has been fulfilled and because I notice an irreversible decision of the FARC to remain unarmed. In addition, the current negotiation process with the ELN has been encouraged. It is urgent to strengthen the security measures and protection of former combatants, social leaders and communities in the territories, while strengthening and strengthening the institutional framework in each item of the agreements. For now, there are advances in the issuance of standards and a significant effort is maintained in social organizations and human rights defenders (interview 2017).

She warned that the peace process was placed in constant danger by the actions of “Congress, political parties and economic powers of a global, national and local order” and that issues such as trafficking, environmental conflicts, political corruption and the complex and deeply rooted exclusion and marginalization of various groups especially marginalized ethnic groups in Colombia will need continued attention moving forward (Valdés Arcila interview 2017).

10 Redprodepaz has 327 partners across Colombia and works towards values of equality, peace, reconciliation, solidarity and participatory democracy (Valdés Arcila interview 2017).
Villar Guhl said she understood the skepticism shared by many surrounding the outcome of the peace agreement with the FARC—largely marked by distrust in political figures. However, she personally felt optimistic, with her viewpoint being informed from the many people she had met with across the country, particularly those where the conflict was most rife (Villar Guhl interview 2018). Moreover, she stressed the importance of involving children in the work following the peace process and ensuring that their ideas are integrated in order for peace to be sustainable and carried forth by future generations (Villar Guhl interview 2018). Rodas agreed and pointed to the fact that this youth engagement in peacebuilding is largely rural, with youth in urban contexts remaining very disconnected and, in many cases, protected from the conflict (Rodas interview 2017). Similarly, Raul Collazos Ardila explained the severity of political corruption in Colombia and the importance in acknowledging this and taking steps to rebuild trust like returning land to the dispossessed and including a wider range of voices in the decision-making processes (Collazos Ardila interview 2017). Yet despite these criticisms, Raul believes in the peace process and believes hope is a powerful social mobilizer to break existing and limiting paradigms (Collazos Ardila interview 2017). He explained:

The youths, especially the rural ones, have served as cannon fodder in the Colombian armed conflict. The conditions of economic and political social exclusion of the youths have made them more vulnerable to the recruitment of the different armed actors of the conflict. Let’s look at some exclusion data taken from DANE: In Cauca, 70% of its population is rural. They live in smallholdings that, on average, do not exceed one hectare. 70% over 50 years old. Education data showing exclusion end primary 80.6%, secondary 8.87%, technical-technological, 0.21%, university 0.42%, postgraduate 0.06%. Finally, according to IOM data, 52% of victims of the conflict are under 26 years of age. It is young people who die in wars, and in this case children of peasants impoverished by the model of exclusionary society (interview 2017).

Collazos Ardila described the current landscape as very complex, explaining that “the agreements between the FARC and the Government have been signed, however there are many obstacles to their implementation: the government's failure to comply with the agreements, but fundamentally the economic interests derived from land tenure and strategic megaprojects, especially the energéticas [trans. energetic] miners” (Collazos Ardila interview 2017). To achieve lasting peace, he said the extreme polarization in Colombia must be addressed, in pursuit of social justice for the marginalized and a reduction of inequality (Collazos Ardila interview 2017).
Overall, a variety of perspectives of the peace process were shared. In large part, interviewees saw the peace process as a critical, though an imperfect offering—still, a step forward, nonetheless. Interviewees pointed to the complex layers of the conflict that has stretched across many decades and geographic terrain. Several social and political issues persisted at the time of writing, with structural inequalities broadly being a key area of concern. These inequalities transpired on the local level, within individuals’ families and communities and had deep roots in the colonial and imperial violences that Colombia has experienced. During the timeframe of when the perspectives above were collected rural/urban divides, class inequality and the challenges of demobilization and pursuing justice were presented as key concerns. A deep-rooted culture of violence, polarization and lack of trust between communities and individuals were also key concerns. These topics will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, alongside what yoga might offer in addressing peace on individual and collective levels within Colombia.

5.3 Creative methods of peacebuilding in Colombia

John Paul Lederach describes the act of peacebuilding as much more than post-accord reconstruction. It is understood, rather, as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct (Lederach 1997, 20).

An understanding of peace as taking place beyond the cessation of conflict—beyond peace accords and standalone legislation—allows for a multidimensional definition of peace that establishes the conditions necessary for macro-level and structural changes that accompany the urgent need to address individual, relational, and communal dynamics. Lederach’s conceptual framework for understanding peace speaks to the complexity of conflicts and how they are often characterized by deeply rooted fear and animosity amongst neighbors and communities, often across several generations (Lederach 1997, 23). Understanding this reality, which is simultaneously both complex and difficult to define easily, invites further discussion on different approaches to peace and peacebuilding that, instead of being limited
to the mechanical and material restoration allowed for informal post-conflict and transitioning societies with a focus on relational dynamics. Such an approach, which is “driven by real-life experiences, subjective perceptions, and emotions,” offers a more holistic interpretation of peace (Lederach 1997, 24). It would also facilitate innovative outlets for reframing and redirecting the energies that drive a conflict by providing space(s) to individually and collectively address emotional and psychological traumas. Innovation can be understood in this context as that arts-based and creative-driven peacebuilding techniques, which address relational dynamics and thus contribute to the elements of peace that Lederach (and others) deem to be critical in facilitating a true and, importantly, sustainable peace.

Globally, there are several examples of the creative and artistic avenues for peacebuilding, from the use of hip hop to discuss social justice issues in Tanzania to theatre spaces that unite Palestinian and Israeli youth (Shank and Schirch 2008, 217). Artistic methods of conflict transformation encapsulate a whole constellation of enacted, somatic tools that foster creative expression, from visual and theater arts to music, dance, poetry, from the humanities, fine and performing arts to expressive arts, providing fruitful vehicles for imagination and intuition in the midst of conflict. They welcome sensing and feeling—dimensions so often “managed” or sidelined in conventional approaches—as embodied experiences essential for truly transforming conflict. This makes sense because emotions can be powerful motivators toward transformation just as they are central drivers in conflict escalation (LeBaron 2014, 596).

Michael Shank and Lisa Schirch explain that “the arts have been used for centuries to communicate the human experience in ways that have sometimes nurtured peace and other times fostered violence. While art is not purely functional, it can serve social functions. Art is a tool that can communicate and transform the way people think and act. Arts can change the dynamics in intractable interpersonal, intercommunal, national, and global conflicts” (2008, 217). They further argue that, because solutions for peace require communities to understand and embrace the complexities of the human experience (what Lederach called relational dynamics), peacebuilding tools need to be adequately capable of supporting communities in their transition. Their implicit argument is that, like Lederach’s assertion, traditional formal tools for peacebuilding can be less appropriate to address multifaceted
conflicts. As such, creative outlets for peace can emerge as important tools that speak to these complexities and help communities navigate them while working toward peaceful solutions (Shank and Schirch 2008, 218).

Similar examples can be found in the Colombian context. Among those whom I interviewed throughout this project, the concept of art-based and creative forms of peacebuilding was largely met with enthusiasm. Interviewees recounted the prominence of expressive arts, such as dance, weaving, theatre, creative writing, and painting, in Colombia and how they are already being (and have historically also been) creatively used as a means of coping with violence and conflict, and as expressions of peace (Rodas interview 2017; Cortéz interview 2018; Motta Torres interview 2018). When travelling around Colombia I frequently noted the use of artistic means for social justice and self-expression, particularly related to the peace process. For example, large murals and graffiti around Bogotá, Tunja, Tunal and Santa Marta spoke messages of hope and peace and in some cases, they drew attention to ongoing injustices or disapproval with political leaders.

**Figure 2: Graffiti mural in Bogotá that reads tejiendo esperanza (weaving hope)**
One interviewee explained the importance of trying new and creative avenues for peace, stating: “we have been working in Colombia to accomplish peace in different ways such as political ways, economical ways, and in the military way. So, I think that every creative way that is different to the ways we have been applying for the last 40 to 50 years, is good” (Zapata interview 2018). Juan Diego Castro agreed, saying that the pervasiveness of the complexities of the conflict, specifically the mental health impact it has had on the

11 This educational mural project led by the Banrepcultural lists a historical timeline of peacebuilding events in Colombia from the 19th century to present. The mural is a public education tool to promote citizen’s role in post-conflict and bears the message that peace is a daily act by all of us. More information on the mural can be found here: https://proyectos.banrepcultural.org/proyecto-paz/hechos-de-paz/què-es-el-proyecto-hechos-de-paz
Colombia society, is starting to be acknowledged. He further expressed his belief that creative outlets for peace and reconciliation can offer therapeutic benefit on collective and individual levels to this pursuit (Castro interview 2017). Castro explained that even though all of the subsidies and post-conflict interventions have not reached all of the FARC with several delays and challenges, “the FARC themselves are organizing themselves in small coops and trying to transition— trying to facilitate the transition for former members and for the ex-combatants to civil society” (Castro interview 2017). First impressions of FARC members’ reintegration show that former combatants experience higher-quality lives “in the areas where there are programs or initiatives that have to do with anything else outside of war, such as knitting groups, graffiti or any outlet of artistic expression” (Castro interview 2017). Another interviewee echoed Lederach’s definition of multidimensional peace when they not only encouraged the use of art-based initiatives, but stressed the necessity of coupling them with fundamental changes to more systemic and structural policy and social problems: “all cultural forms, such as music, art, sport, yoga and many others, can be peacebuilding tools. But in order to be truly effective, we must first address the most basic needs of the population, such as food, health, housing, education and employment” (Castaño interview 2018).

Camilla Villar Guhl, an interviewee from Colombia’s UNICEF headquarters in Bogotá, explained the ways in which UNICEF Colombia also engages youth across Colombia through alternative peacebuilding methods, noting that the organization has “special programs called ‘Somos Paz’ (We are Peace), [of which] the basis is art, music, theatre, communication and participation in sports” (Villar Guhl interview 2018). In Villar Guhl’s experience at UNICEF Colombia, these different outlets provide children with the means to explore what it means to build peace in their communities (Villar Guhl interview 2018). Though the organization does not currently use yoga as a tool in their programming, Villar Guhl does believe that the practice offers similar outlets of creatively connecting to peace through the act of embodying peace. She explained that yoga is a good tool to cultivate inner peace because of how relaxing the method is: “if you feel peace within yourself, you can start building peaceful relationships with others” (Villar Guhl interview, 2018).
The following sections briefly explore the various forms of creative peacebuilding currently used in Colombia by Dunna and other organizations where I interviewed people, such as creative writing, visual and material art, dance, and breathing and mindfulness practices, and the therapeutic properties and opportunities for healing and self-discovery that each offer. The chapter ends by returning to yoga with a focused discussion on yoga as a specific tool for peacebuilding in the Colombian context.

5.3.1 Creative writing

Several interviewees talked about writing, and more specifically, journaling, as a positive outlet for cultivating inner and outer peace in Colombia (Rodas interview 2017; López interview 2017b; Orjuela Garcia interview 2018; Lyons interview 2018; Cortéz interview 2018). Creative writing and journaling have been studied in the United States as a structured coping mechanism in response to complex trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that are often experienced by military veterans (Capps 2013; Copen 2013). Writing as an outlet for coping has also been researched in reducing recidivism among male youth inmates (Proctor, Hoffmann, and Allison 2012). The intersections of adult literacy and conflict transformation have been studied in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Sudan and focused on the importance of education as a post-conflict measure for IDP’s and other disadvantaged members of society (McCaffery 2005, 445). Integrating peacebuilding theories and ideas in a post-conflict setting of adult literacy education was found to be impactful on individual and societal levels, allowing participants to learn daily skills but also process their trauma and grief and tell their stories (McCaffery 2005, 460). A UK-based project at the intersection of creative writing and peace work also showed promise (Stickley, Hui, Stubley, Baker, and Watson 2019). In it, 144 refugee and asylum-seeker participants in three UK cities participated and reported increase in language skills but also cultivated experiences of well-being, belonging, hope, safety and self-expression (Stickley et al. 2019, 248, 259). The study found that “the data reveal a poignancy and depth of the shared experiences of participating in a creative writing group. Every culture has a history of storytelling and the centrality of sharing stories and ideas across the project has enabled a respect and connectedness across the participants” (Stickley et al. 2019, 259), which mapped on to previous research on the benefits of creative writing with vulnerable
populations (for example, see Gonçalves, Campos, Hanna, and Ashby 2015; López-Bech and Zúñiga 2017).

For Dunna, these successful uses of creative writing and journaling echo preliminary findings of the creative writing projects for incarcerated youth the organization has recently developed. Based on her experience working with Dunna’s creative writing and movement-based programs, Alejandra Orjuela Garcia, one of the organization’s research assistants, was able to offer some insights on the strengths and limitations of creative writing in peacebuilding efforts. Specifically, she noted that the creative writing technique offers program participants, an outlet to enhance self-awareness and in turn, confront and come to terms with the crimes of which they had been part (Alejandra Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). She also explained that for youth in detention, journaling was a way of remembering and reconstructing their own past as a way to become conscious of what was while reimagining a different path forward (Alejandra Orjuela Garcia interview 2018).

The program’s participants also reported the catharsis that the creative writing technique offered, while also being a useful distraction to pass the time while incarcerated. That is not to say that the technique did not have its limitations; while some were more open than others to confronting their own past, others struggled to put their experiences into words, or feared the repercussions of this truth telling (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). The latter was a considerable hurdle in some cases; participants were afraid to write their true thoughts and experiences down in fear of who might read these and had little to no trust of their peers (fellow inmates) or authorities (such as prison guards). Literacy barriers also posed a significant challenge. Some participants struggled with the actual writing process due to poor literacy skills, sometimes a consequence of their service with guerilla groups or organised crime units (and therefore departure from the formal education system) while other times a reflection of a life of poverty and/or with addiction problems (Orjuela Garcia

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12 I learned more about this aspect of Dunna from Alejandra Orjuela Garcia, an undergraduate student studying Psychology and Anthropology at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. Alejandra and I worked closely together while she was volunteering for Dunna as a Research Assistant. Alejandra has assisted Dunna with several projects, such as the social housing project in Tunal that we interviewed participants together in. Alejandra had also worked in assessing/interviewing for Dunna in a creative writing project at a youth detention center in both Bogotá and Tunja.
The limitations of a creative writing and journaling-led technique can be overcome by using yoga as a complementary tool, Garcia explained. By doing so, Dunna offers participants in their programs an alternative means of expression for the instances where verbal and written expression might not be possible or useful in supporting the participant’s rehabilitation (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018).

In speaking about the effect of these techniques, Orjuela Garcia also emphasized—as have others—the need for broader, structural changes that would enhance the impact of art- and movement-based programming. She suggested that the two go hand in hand: grassroots initiatives and individual and community-level work such as the programs run by Dunna can influence and shape politics and public policies, and vice versa (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018). In particular, Orjuela Garcia stressed the importance of the role of governments in not just ensuring access to the types of services, such as Dunna’s programming, for citizens, but in also developing appropriate policies to address and remove the barriers and the structural inequalities that shape an individual’s social conditions (Orjuela Garcia interview 2018).

5.3.2 Visual and material art

Art as an outlet in peace work has been widely studied across the world (Heley 2010; Mani 2011; Sanger 2013; Labor 2018; and Shank and Schirch 2008) and with specific groups such as refugees/displaced populations (Ely, Koury, Bennett, Hartinger, Green, and Nochajski 2017; Fitzpatrick 2002; Gould 2005, Kalmanowitz and Ho 2016; and Kidd, Zahir and Khan 2008) and ex-combatants/demobilizing populations (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018; and García and Potash 2019). Creative expressions of resistance, mourning, memorializing, and social justice can be found across Colombia, from street art to prestigious exhibits galleries and museums. Several interviewees discussed the benefits of art in the peacebuilding process throughout the research process (Rodas interview 2017; López interview 2017b; Lyons interview 2018, Cortéz interview 2018; Sarmiento Bernal 2018; Combariza interview 2018; Castro interview 2017; Castaño interview 2018; Ardila interview 2018; Zuleta interview 2017; Villar Guhl interview 2018; Quiñones interview 2018; and Motta Torres interview 2018). Art has been an important part of healing in
Colombia, and I visited some examples of this around the country and learned about the conflict through artistic outlets. For example, a pilot project in Colombia found art-therapy to be a useful modality for demobilizing FARC members and found the practice to serve four critical functions: “facilitating communication amongst community members, preserving memories of personal and historical relevance, promoting acceptance, and increasing self-reflection” (García and Potash 2019, 122).

Another example is the Toys for Reconciliation initiative, led by the NGO Descontamina, which engages ex-paramilitary and ex-guerilla groups together in a prison setting as part of a DDR process in Bucaramanga, Colombia (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018). The demobilized incarcerated persons in this project crafted toy elephants with the intention that those buying them would offer them as a ‘reconciliation gift to someone’ or would donate them to a local children’s organization to spread the message of reconciliation there (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018, 66). The project sought to facilitate reconciliation amongst participants as well as between those demobilizing and citizens at large, addressing the socioeconomic barriers and emotional struggles faced by the ex-combatants as well as the social stigma they faced in regard to demobilization, all barriers to successful DDR in Colombia (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018, 62). This project sought to address concerns surrounding the peace process between the FARC and the government of Colombia related to the tension between the publics need for truth-seeking, reparation and healing and the demobilization and reintegration of those who cased harm (Avoine and Bolivar Durán 2018, 67). Engaging a decolonizing peace framework (see Fontan 2012; Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013), the organizers focused on Latin American decolonial theory (Diaz 2010; Sánchez 2014) which seeks to “construct itself from local knowledge, and plays outside the frames of political modernity, giving special attention to ‘subaltern’ practices or practices from the ‘other’” while questioning “the historical processes that have permitted coloniality to continue to permeate our understandings of social conflicts” (Avoine and Bolivar Durán 2018, 67). Their decolonizing peace framework aimed to both engage participants in tactile creative work while speaking back to national and international efforts in the DDR process that have left many feeling unsettled by “breaking patterns of political polarisation, engaging collective empathy, and demonstrating the lived
reality of demobilised people” as part of reconciliation efforts in Colombia (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018, 69). This grassroots example forged peace between participants, between demobilized persons and citizens buying their elephants as well as decenders the dominant peace paradigm—decolonizing the narrative more broadly by showcasing acts of non-violence intertwined in a myriad of relations where violence was once pervasive (Avoine and Bolívar Durán 2018).

Art in Colombia is also a means of public awareness, education and collective healing. While in Bogotá, I visited the Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (Modern Art Museum of Bogotá), or MAMBO, where I viewed several exhibits by renowned Colombian artist Juan Manuel Echavarría.13 His exhibits offer teachings about the history and also the impacts on the conflict in Colombia through creative and thought-provoking visuals. For example, his exhibit Réquiem NN depicts photos of tombstones of unidentified persons—the disappeared, the unnamed, the missing the forgotten victims of the conflict. The exhibit explained to viewers that body parts would surface in the Magdalena River and the villagers of Puerto Berrio, Antioquia would collect them and bury them with dignity in these small tombs (Echavarría 2019a). Echavarría explained how the villagers would come to the tombstones depicted in the exhibit in a ritual to honor the unnamed dead and to speak to the spirits and ask them for guidance in their lives. In exchange for this spiritual wisdom, villagers pledged to take care of their tombs—bringing flowers, painting the tombs, and even naming the corpses, giving a living memory and a space to honour those lost. Echavarría explained that he sees this site as collective resistance: “the people of Puerto Berrio don’t allow, maybe unconsciously, the victimizers to make their victims disappear in the river” (Echavarría 2019a). The exhibit by Echavarría displayed at the MAMBO was grand in nature, displaying images of the actual tombs, with the image changing as you moved past them, a metaphor for the lives lost that are both static and stuck yet are given new meaning and hope by their caretakers who are kind strangers.

13 Juan Manuel Echavarría’s full collection and biography can be found here: https://jmechavarria.com/en/works/
I also visited the exhibit, *Silencios*, an ongoing collaboration between Echavarría and Fernando Grisalez that has been in progress since 2010. This exhibit displays photographs of over 180 blackboards in 120 schools that were abandoned due to the armed conflict in the regions of Bojayá, Chocó, and Caquetá (Echavarría 2019b). In some cases, the schools are eerily deserted, overgrown with vegetation or inhabited by roaming animals. In other instances, they show signs of life, having been taken up as storage or resting space for armed groups. The images provide a raw look into the armed conflict and its impact on communities, families, youth and education, while also providing an insight into life as a guerilla/paramilitary. One of the chalkboards, at the Rural School of Mampuján, held an almost illegible message, behind the dirt and cracks. It read: “la bonito es estar vivo,” which translates to “the beautiful thing is to be alive.” Mampuján is a primarily Afro-Colombian rural community where many of its members became displaced after paramilitaries slaughtered 15 people in a neighbouring village. Mampuján was the first community of victims to receive a Supreme Court judgment in 2005 for land restitution and reparations (Sembrandopaz 2020).
Lastly, I visited the exhibit *The War We Have Not Seen: A Historical Memory Project*, a collection of paintings by demobilized persons from ex-combatants of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), wounded soldiers of the Colombian Army, and demobilized women of the FARC-EP (Fundación Puntos de Encuentros 2020). The work was an output of workshops led by Colombia artists, Juan Manuel Echavarría, Fernando Grisalez, and Noel Palacios. Participants were simply asked to paint what they felt and what moved them most.

The 480 paintings in this exhibit offer a chilling sensory experience and a unique glimpse into the lived realities of armed conflict and the complexities of the human experience,
largely from the perspective of ‘perpetrators’ of violence. The paintings are evocative and educational to the viewer, while simultaneously offering space for healing and reconciliation on individual and group levels. They are both informed by and inform memories, sometimes intercepting traditional historical narratives. In the case of *The War We Have Not Seen: A Historical Memory Project*, the act of the art itself was therapeutic and part of restorative peacebuilding practices for those participating. The Fundación Puntos de Encuentro described the workshops as a space for dialogue and trust where the ex-combatants “managed to discuss and communicate the unspeakable. They painted their own truths without having been taught how to paint” (*n.d.*).

Figure 10: *The War We Have Not Seen: A Historical Memory Project, MAMBO, Bogotá*

While in Bogotá, I also visited the *Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación (The Center for Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation)* in Bogotá, an inclusive and participatory space for survivors to reconstruct historical memories and for others to learn about the conflict(s), remember the lives lost, and offer their thoughts and prayers. The architecture of the museum itself purposely evokes a somber and heavy mood. The grounds are peaceful, with water reflecting off the main structure and beautiful ‘forget-me-not’ flower offerings to a wall of grave sites of unidentified victims. The Center is meant to represent the dead, the memories of the conflict, the hope for a peaceful future. The architects “promoted a participatory [design] process where the survivors of atrocities could bring, as a symbolic gesture, a handful of soil dedicated to the victims. The soil symbolized the source of the armed conflict in struggles over landowning but also represented something that belongs
to everybody. They wanted people to feel part of the initiative for peace that the Center promotes” (Perry 2015). The Center is also home to other exhibits and events and, at the time of my visit, featured an awareness campaign on domestic violence and inequality. Moreover, the space is a meeting ground for several, including a group of elders who knit as a peacebuilding practice.

Figures 11 and 12: Photos of the grounds of the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación, Bogotá

On the topic of visual and material arts as a vehicle of individual and community peacebuilding, I interviewed Sylvia Motta Torres who lives in Baranquilla, Colombia and works as the Director of the Radio Cultural Uniautónoma (the Cultural Radio Station of the Autonomous University of Baranquilla). From 2010-2013, she also worked for the Agencia colombiana para la Reintegración de la Presidencia de la República de Colombia (Agency for Reintegration of the Presidency of the Republic of Colombia). Today, this
organization is called the Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (The Colombian Agency for the Reintegration of Armed People and Groups),\textsuperscript{14} which is the government entity in charge of leading the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process of persons from the different armed groups of the country (Motta Torres interview 2018). Her work there included creating and directing an artistic education pilot project with both demobilized populations and their receptor communities. Working primarily in Ibague and Santa Marta—two regions of Colombia with high numbers of demobilized persons—Torres’s projects focused on the inclusion of artistic education in the social integration process, with an aim to transform individuals and their relationship within a broader pedagogical framework that promoted a culture of peace (Motta Torres interview 2018).\textsuperscript{15} Motta Torres explained that this type of art-based work is underpinned by a pedagogy for peacebuilding. Pablo Freire’s conceptual principles in “Pedagogía del Oprimido y del Teatro Social de Augusto Boal” (August Boal’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Social Theater) form the basis for the framework of reference in the methodology implemented in the ACR pilot project (Motta Torres interview 2018).

When asked about the value and benefits of alternative methods of peacebuilding, such as theatre, dance or yoga in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, Motta Torres explained to me in a follow-up email, a continuation of our interview, that:

the value of these alternative forms of peace building lies in the essence of the different forms of expression, or languages, of the arts. The creative process awakes in human beings an infinite number of possibilities of perception and sensitiveness, which in itself is an important aiding tool for a process of internal transformation; this transformative capacity comes to be because the artistic exercise works first with emotions and only later it builds the “thought” (works with reason). In other words, artistic creation is subjective and the subjectivity of the person who engages in the artistic process is the first one to be transformed (Motta Torres interview 2018).

\textsuperscript{14} For more information visit: http://www.reintegracion.gov.co/en
\textsuperscript{15} Information about this specific project can be found in Camila Medina Arbeláez and Natalia Escobar’s documentary: Arte para la paz: contribuciones a la reincorporación y prevención del reclutamiento (“Art for Peace: contribution to the reincorporation and recruitment prevention”). Furthermore, more of interviewee Sylvia Motta Torre’s research on the international state of the art, both in theory and praxis, of the use of artistic language in reconciliation and peace building processes can be found in the document, “Las artes en la construcción de una cultura de Paz, metodología estratégica. Agencia colombiana para la reintegración, 2012” (“The Arts for the establishment of a culture of peace. Strategic methodology. Colombia’s Agency for Reintegration, 2012”).
Motta Torres explained how the creative aspects of art can pave a pathway to deconstructing the roots of violence, which she understands as being enmeshed within the lived experiences of Colombian society—especially those living most vulnerably (Motta Torres interview 2018). She explained that intolerance and a lack of understanding of the ‘other’ can create a context for violence, and that art has the ability to counterweigh these realities through experiential and perceptive processes facilitated through art (Motta Torres interview 2018). She explained that through the creative exercise,

the individual starts a process of re-understanding of his or her surroundings and what he or she has lived through, and in this way the individual is empowered with new forms of expression and communication. As well, this exercise allows for a potential development of critical, social and creative capacities, and through the collective artistic exercise, which should be the basis of the methodology, begins the construction of basic healthy human relations, characteristic of a culture of peace (Motta Torres interview 2018).

Furthermore, she stressed that the art method chosen is a means and not an end, meaning that artistic aptitude of the artists and the output of projects is of little relevance (Motta Torres interview 2018). The goal, rather, is to “recover, through the creative exercise, the humane, emotional, critical, affective, and argumentative capacities of the participants in the process, from which it is possible to begin a recuperation of that basic humanity needed for the reception and reunion between different groups and communities” (Motta Torres interview 2018). However, Motta Torres also cautions that although creative and art-based methods can be effective and transform internal and social conflicts, a set formula cannot be applied to all contexts and populations.

5.3.3 Dance

In exploring yoga as an embodied practice, I sought to inquire about dance because it, too, engages movement and breath and the relationship between the individual and the collective. Dance has been used in many spaces as an outlet for healing, peacebuilding and reconciliation (for examples, see Lance 2012; Wheeler and Stomfay-Stitz 2011; and Acarón 2018). A key element of dance as therapy is its relationship to music, which Lederach explains by noting that music transcends the auditory, vibrating through all the cells of the body, deeply penetrating the human experience (Lederach 2016, 197). He
further observes that an understanding of “conflict and peace must find ways to account for the elements that go below and beyond the linear modalities of making sense of things as if rational thought can disembodify itself from who we are as beings made of sound and vibration” (Lederach 2016, 197).

One of Dunna’s programs focuses on dance, so it was important to explore how the two methods, dance and yoga, can be both complementary and very different, inquiring as to why Dunna might choose one method over another for a given population. Foremost, I spoke with Gabriela Martínez, Dunna’s advisor on dance and body-movement. Martínez is a Psychologist at the Universidad de los Andes and specializes in body-centered therapies for the treatment of psychological trauma. She has a background in trauma-informed care and somatic psychology. Dunna’s Body, Dance, and Movement projects provide an opportunity to connect with oneself as well as others, and are primarily aimed at cultivating bodily awareness, providing participants an opportunity to look inwards and learn about one’s internal state through bodily sensations from movement (Martínez interview 2017).

A specific objective of this program is the repair of social connections in communities deeply affected by the conflict where trust has been broken. Part of the programming involves building a collective memory by recalling aspects of dance or other cultural expressions, such as by reconnecting with traditional music with which a given community was engaged before the impact of the effects of the conflict (Martínez interview 2017). Specifically, dance has been part of rituals and celebrations, especially within Afro-Caribbean communities, with one example being the community of Bojayá in the Choco region of Colombia (Rios Oyola and Acarón Rios 2020). In this community, dance plays a critical role in peacebuilding as an outlet for memorialization and protesting injustice through Afro-Colombian funerary rituals that commemorate the Bojayá massacre in 2002 (Rios Oyola and Acarón Rios 2020, 392). In several cases, communities became disconnected from community traditions, including dance, because of the disruption to community life and traditional cultural practices caused by the presence of heightened armed conflict across Colombia. The fear inflicted by persistent violence and curfews resulted in people no longer using communal spaces such as parks, so dancing again in
these spaces in particular has been an important component in reclaiming them, as well as in rebuilding trust within the community (Martínez interview 2017).

I asked Martínez why she thought that this type of body movement, particularly, reaches people and how it is effective in addressing complex trauma, either alongside traditional methods within the field of psychology or in lieu of them. She explained: “Trauma, by itself, it’s related to movement. Trauma in a biological way, is a kind of a paralysis, or like a surrendering state, that doesn't allow people to move in a way, or to fight against whatever is threatening them” (Martínez interview 2017). Trauma is deeply connected to the body, so being able to channel the memories held within one’s body is important, and movement is a way to do this; dance, therefore, is a great outlet for this exercise because it is both culturally accepted in the communities with which Dunna works and is often connected to people’s identity (Martínez interview 2017). The dance programs at Dunna have been helpful in cultivating self-awareness and vulnerability, emotional regulation, rebuilding trust, and inspiring feelings of safety (Martínez interview 2017). Martínez explained how Dunna’s dance programs are effective in communities already connected to dance and music and where community and relational ties need repair. In contrast to the yoga projects, she believes the dance programs are more communally focused and allow for expressive and free movement in a more unstructured way than yoga, which is calmer and more introspective, engaging in the practice on one’s own mat (Martínez interview 2017).

Dunna has also recently published research on the effectiveness of their dance projects as post-conflict intervention that showed statistically significant changes in participants, including levels of aggression, sleep, appetite, perspective-taking and emotional regulation (Quiñones et al. 2018b, 110). This particular study consisted of 120-hour training sessions carried out in five municipalities in Colombia with 97 participants. The findings suggest that dance-movement strategies assisted in rebuilding social capital and trust in communities (Quiñones et al. 2018b, 110-112). The particular communities studied had “a visible rupture in social capital caused by imposed by internal displacement and by ad-hoc rules imposed by armed groups” where group gatherings were forbidden and a system of reporting neighbours was implemented—resulting in high levels of distrust in several communities (Quiñones et al. 2018b, 112).
I also interviewed Carolina Rodas, a 5Rhythms teacher, academic and writer located in Bogotá. Developed by Gabrielle Roth of the US, 5Rhythms is a dynamic dance and movement practice that “ignites creativity, connection and community,” transcending meanings of ‘dance’ alone with its meditative properties (5Rhythms, 2019). It applies a method by which its practitioners can creatively express emotions, aggression, anxieties or vulnerabilities, and can be described as “healing, exhilarating as well as deeply restorative” (5Rhythms, 2019). Rodas described 5Rhythms as “a dance meditation, but it doesn’t mean that we have any choreography or that we dance in any particular way” (5Rhythms, 2019). Rodas described 5Rhythms as a way to gain awareness of and connect with one’s own being, one’s body, with others, and with the Universe as a whole (Rodas interview 2017). She explained that unlike other forms of meditative practice, the 5Rhythms method is very unstructured and unregulated, allowing room for creativity and the cultivation of a sense of freedom in self-exploration (Rodas interview 2017).

As a writer, Rodas explained that it can be very difficult to write about or verbally express trauma, whereas movement-focused methods allow for a different form of processing. In her personal experience, for example, she develops her own work first through dance, and then in written form (Rodas interview 2017). Moreover, in many of the populations she has worked with, in some cases where literacy rates are low, she offers the options to draw one’s feelings following a 5Rhythm session. She notes that the process of reconnecting with one’s own body following wartime can be very therapeutic and an integral part of healing (Rodas interview 2017). She explained:

I remember many times I’ve worked with displaced people [in Colombia and East Timor]. Just the awareness of having their feet on the ground is a huge step for them. So, there is no need for big stories or anything, just learning how to put again their feet on the ground—because they have lost their ground, they have lost their earth, ‘su tierra.’ So, just allowing them to feel the ground again, and feel that they are now in a different ground but that that is their ground in this present moment, is a huge step for any community (Rodas interview 2017).

5.3.4 Mindfulness projects

On the topic of creative methods for peace, I interviewed Camila Díaz Samper, Program Coordinator of the organization RESPIRA en Colombia (BREATHE in Colombia).
RESPIRA, founded in 2013, “promotes mindfulness practice with a sense of social responsibility through targeted training programs that aim to improve personal wellbeing and foster community peacebuilding throughout Colombia and in all sectors of society” (RESPIRA, 2019). Díaz Samper explained that the organization was founded as a way to offer mindfulness programs as a form of peacebuilding in Colombia, specifically within the field of education. Their mandate has since expanded beyond their work with teachers to include working in schools with students who were exposed to a lot of violence. RESPIRA’s work now includes facilitating mindfulness training for businesses and also within communities-at-large, focusing on and working with groups such as women living in the Tumaco region, which is largely an Afro-Colombian and Indigenous population that has experienced trauma (Díaz Samper interview 2017).

In addition to Tumaco, RESPIRA works across the country in several communities such as Cali, Cauca and Bogotá. Their projects follow the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed a mindfulness-based stress reduction technique, though the organization has created their own tools and programs to cater specifically to Colombians (Díaz Samper interview 2017). The organization’s website explains that mindfulness is a “personal development practice based on mental training exercises and self-observation, supported by neuroscientific evidence,” and that “a regular mindfulness practice develops a more focused and balanced presence through a variety of simple but powerful exercises such as the intentional observation of the natural breath or the awareness of our thoughts, emotions and mental states” (RESPIRA, 2019). Díaz Samper described RESPIRA’s understanding of mindfulness as “a practice for human development and wellbeing,” as “observing what is arising in your own body with openness, with curiosity, but most of all with compassion” (Díaz Samper interview 2017).

RESPIRA stresses the importance of adapting their work to specific contexts and populations, building trust, and integrating their practices with the music, dance, and cultural beliefs of those with whom they work. They do so in being mindful of the complexities of trauma and the lived experiences of different racialized and socio-economic groups (Díaz Samper interview 2017). Overall, their work empowers participants to better understand their bodies, minds and nervous system while learning to
harness the present moment and regulate their difficult emotions. Camila explained how this connects to broader peacebuilding, saying: “if we don’t cultivate peace from the inside out, how can we really talk about peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Through mindfulness we see how resilient we can become (Díaz Samper interview 2017). She believes we all have these tools within ourselves and mindfulness practice helps cultivate this.

During my stay in Bogotá, I also had the opportunity to meet with staff of the Embassy of Canada to Colombia, which has collaborated with RESPIRA and has facilitated similar projects on creative solutions for peace. I met with Ariel-Ann Lyons, the First Secretary of Development and Team Leader of the Human Dignity & Gender Equality Programming, and Federico Salcedo, a Development Officer, about the several ways in which the embassy engages peacebuilding initiatives across Colombia. The embassy’s central development goals include building an inclusive and sustainable economy, supporting Colombia’s peacebuilding efforts, promoting education, and advocating for the protection of the rights of children and youth (Government of Canada, 2019a). Federico Salcedo also noted Canada’s emphasis on working with Colombia’s most vulnerable, such as those living in regions deeply affected by past or ongoing conflicts and children who are currently out of school (Salcedo interview 2018).

The Embassy of Canada to Colombia is also part of a multi-stakeholder initiative entitled, “Vive la Educación,” which works to make schools in areas most affected by the conflict more inclusive and accessible (Lyons interview 2018). The project specifically works to assist children with psychological care and after-school programs, offering them outlets to process what they experienced in the armed conflict, with a specific focus on Afro-Colombian children (Government of Canada 2019b). As part of this initiative, mindfulness-based activities have been organized for staff and students in partnership with the organizations Save the Children and RESPIRA (Salcedo interview 2018). Initial evaluations of the activities have been very positive, and improvements in student attention, lower rates of aggression, and cooperative behaviour have been reported amongst students (Salcedo interview 2018). Teachers and students alike reported that this training changed their lives and, in many cases, that it was the first self-care training they had ever
received ( Lyons interview 2018). Overall, the Embassy of Canada to Colombia has been impressed by the mindfulness-based interventions that they have supported and observed, citing cost-effectiveness and a close alignment with Colombia’s national priorities of addressing the impacts of the longstanding conflict and incorporating peaceful tools that work towards goals of education and reconciliation (Salcedo interview 2018).

5.4 Concluding thoughts

This chapter has provided the necessary historical data that precedes and informs the FARC conflict, such as key events including La Violencia and the Thousand Days War. This background is offered to contextualize the contemporary social and political contexts that surround the key interview findings (Chapter 6) and a discussion of them (Chapter 7). This chapter then narrows in on who the FARC is and more specifically on the peace process between the FARC and the Colombian government in 2016. In doing so, I discussed the 2016 referendum ‘no vote’ and the significance of this, as well as introduce key concerns surrounding the demobilization process. This chapter then offered on-the-ground perspective from citizens and organizations as they reflect on the peace process and what it means to them. Their questions and reflections lead to a discussion on what peace can look like in the Colombian context and what tangible tools and outlets for peacebuilding might be useful in this pursuit. This led us to a more comprehensive discussion on alternative and creative approaches to peacebuilding in Colombia. More specifically, I explored examples involving creative writing, visual and material art, dance/movement and mindfulness approaches. These examples help conceptualize peace as not a fragment of time or end result but as a dynamic social process that extends beyond macro-level peacebuilding needs such as democratic reform or infrastructure rebuilding. Instead, these examples assist in envisioning what sustainable peace from the bottom up might look like when the psychosocial nature of conflict such as mutuality in relationships and community building are addressed (Lederach 1995; Lederach 2005; Byrne and Senehi 2008; and Llewellyn 2012). This discussion serves as a foundation and entry point into the exploration of how yoga is a method of peacebuilding applicable to the Colombian context and beyond.
Chapter 6

6 Yoga as a method of building peace: Key findings from interviews

This chapter explores key themes raised in 75 semi-structured, open-ended interviews in various communities across Colombia. The interviews were conducted between November 1, 2017 and February 1, 2018 and involved a wide variety of stakeholders. These findings stem primarily from the peacebuilding-centered work of Dunna in Colombia and aim to offer a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the broader research question that guides this dissertation: how can alternative forms of peacebuilding in conflict/post-conflict settings contribute to efforts for peace through creative, embodied and grassroots participation? Chapter 5 recounted some of the innovative methods of peacebuilding explored in Colombia such as dance, creative writing, art, and mindfulness projects, and here, I narrow the focus to the practice of yoga. The findings below showcase how Dunna’s approach to yoga, and the Satyananda practice specifically, differs from other representations of yoga globally and from other methods of post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding. This chapter also offers concrete examples, based on the first-hand experiences of participants and organizers of Dunna’s yoga projects, of how yoga is a tool of individual and collective peacebuilding.

6.1 The Satyananda tradition and trauma-informed yoga

The particular type of yoga that Dunna teaches stems from the Indian yogic tradition of Satyananda (introduced in more detail in Chapter 3). Satyananda yoga, often described as ‘integral’ yoga by Dunna staff, is a type of yoga that works to activate the relaxation components of the brain (López interview 2018). María Adelaida López explained that “when you have been through stressful moments in your life, you need to learn how to teach your mind, your body and your emotions to relax again” (interview 2018).
Satyananda yoga is designed to meet this need, and to be an outlet for its practitioner to regain confidence and restore balance between the body and the mind” (López interview 2018). The different components of Satyananda yoga are designed to invite participants to relax and also to synchronize their breathing with movement as a way to develop present moment awareness and regulation of the nervous system—rather than a fixation on perfecting the postures themselves (López interview 2018). A primary focus of the Satyananda tradition is the breath through pranayama breathing exercises: “breathing is very important for the brain, for the organs, for the stabilization of the nervous system” (López interview 2017b). Other components include yoga nīdra (guided relaxation), which allows a deep conscious form of relaxation to be experienced other than sleep. Meditation, used as a means to become conscious of and sit with one’s thoughts, feelings, and body, is also integrated into the practice (López interview 2017b).

Dunna yoga instructor Margarita Ochoa explained that Satyananda yoga reaches beyond the physical aspects of the practice, which she explains is in contrast to more mainstream interpretations that largely derive from a Hatha yoga tradition (Ochoa interview 2017). She expressed:

When you teach in a regular studio people come and they go, and they just come like a trend to yoga and then they leave. But in the yoga context with Dunna, you know that you are really planting a seed into people about the profound tools of yoga to improve yourself as a person, to improve yourself as a member of the society, of your neighborhood, your family, or at work (Ochoa interview 2017).

Ochoa has been working with Dunna for several years, largely with programs focused on healing for those who were sexually abused in the context of the war, and also works with a low-income housing population in Santa Marta (members of which I interviewed) (Ochoa interview 2017). She agreed that the basic tenets of Satyananda yoga are always followed in Dunna’s protocols: āsanas, pranayama (breathing techniques), yoga nīdra (guided relaxation), and meditation (Ochoa interview 2017). Particular aspects may be emphasized in any class, or the content of the guided relaxation might be adapted to specific populations, but the tradition of Satyananda is never compromised. The objective is to offer a holistic version of yoga that speaks to multiple aspects of the human being (i.e., beyond the physical body), which has been observed to be positive in addressing complex traumas.
For example, when offering guided visualizations, it can be helpful for some populations to reflect on their past; yet, in other contexts conscious effort is made to not retrigger memories of the past but instead to focus on the present moment. This could be true, for example, for people who have experienced sexual abuse (Ochoa interview 2017):

So, in that way, Satyananda yoga is very, very careful of the experience everyone is having with the practice. I have to be careful in my wording, also in the emphasis I did, in the āsanas. And for example, in yoga nīdra that you take the students to a very profound relaxation, then some visualizations... you the visualization should be being careful with their experience, not to bring some traumatic. For example, in yoga nīdra sometimes you use emotional experiences... for example ‘feel the sadness,’ ‘feel aggression,’ or ‘feel happiness,’ or ‘feel you are forgiving’... Yet, in this special group you have to take care not to bring some experiences back (Ochoa interview 2017).

Dunna teacher Ignacio Zuleta describes Satyananda yoga as a wholesome and complete practice with a balance of physical postures, breathing, meditation, and relaxation as described by Ochoa and López. These same core components form the foundation of the classes he teaches both inside and outside of his work with Dunna, and that make up his personal daily practice (Zuleta interview 2017). He explained that this branch of yoga does not come from ‘the west,’ and rather “it comes directly from India so it’s a very pure tradition” (Zuleta interview 2017). He described his approach to yoga as not very “physically centered. It’s more for mind management.” The aim, therefore, is not in achieving a “flexible, strong and fit body, but instead how can this help you in your day to day in living a wholesome life” (Zuleta interview 2017). López agreed and said that Satyananda yoga is more slowed down and static and explained that,

People who have been through trauma, their bodies are very stiff, so they can't do that. I think the main difference is that our yoga is very systematic, and very focused on consciousness, relaxation response and it's very restorative. That's our focus, not anything different than to give you that relaxation state. To activate the parasympathetic system, not the sympathetic but the parasympathetic (López interview 2017).

Zuleta also shared his critiques on the Americanization of yoga, echoing concerns raised in Chapter 3 such as the reduction of the practice to a commercialized form, which has manifested in a perceived hyper focus on physical fitness and self-betterment as seen in more mainstream branches of yoga (Zuleta interview 2017). Contrasting his practice with more “mainstream” forms, he explained that while the postures themselves have an impact
on the body and the mind in any of the yoga traditions, Satyananda yoga expressly works on the inner self and does not emphasize the physical body as the central focus (Zuleta interview 2017). The growth of yoga within mainstream settings and within popular culture in Colombia, and globally, in some ways makes it easier to work with populations as they may already be exposed to what some of the benefits of yoga are. Conversely, this can add complexity, since it simplifies yoga as a practice and fails to differentiate a deep restorative and therapeutic branch of Satyananda yoga with other types (Zuleta interview 2017; López interview 2017b).

During the Build Peace conference in Bogotá, I attended a workshop on the topic of yoga and trauma run by the US-based organization Feet on the Ground,¹ and later interviewed the organization’s co-founders, Samara Andrade and Emily Pantalone. Feet on the Ground teaches trauma-sensitive yoga, which they describe as holding space for participants and allowing them the agency to make choices for themselves, since all adjustments and class offerings including poses, breathwork, and so on are optional (Andrade interview 2017). Classifying yoga classes in trauma-sensitive ways is a multifaceted effort that necessitates attention to intricate details such as the language used to communicate with participants during the class. For example, Pantalone explained that using invitational language rather than an instructive tone allows for increased agency for participants (Pantalone interview 2017). Andrade explained:

I would say that the biggest focus [of trauma informed yoga] is around holding space for people to make choices, to make choices for themselves and recover that sort of agency over their own experience, so everything is optional that we teach. And is also like… the other kind of biggest focus is on introspection, so your body… your ability to kind of take a sense of your body’s internal temperature, so to speak, like what's happening inside yourself... and so there's a lot of focuses on practices that try to bring people back, invite them back into the body, and sometimes that's not a

¹ Feet on the Ground was founded in 2016 on the belief that “mental health education and complementary trauma resolution approaches should be accessible and all as a human right” (Feet on the Ground, 2019). Feet on the Ground brings “trauma-informed movement, mindfulness and education to out-of-reach and under-resourced communities” including those in countries experiencing war and conflict (Feet on the Ground, 2019; Pantalone interview 2017). Feet on the Ground staff have, for example, worked in Sudan, Afghanistan, and Jordan, and with populations who have experienced a lot of trauma, such as sexual assault survivors, displaced/refugee populations, and staff of organizations working in trauma settings (Feet on the Ground, 2019; Pantalone interview 2017; Andrade interview 2017).
comfortable experience because they have dissociated for a reason, right? They’ve been through traumatic things and it's much more difficult to be with the feelings. So sometimes trauma-informed yoga doesn’t feel super great, you know, not everybody walks out feeling happy. We are really working on different practices, which help sort of expand that window of tolerance (Andrade interview 2017).

Non-hierarchal language (for example, language that does not privilege an option provided as better/harder or lesser-than/easier) allows participants to choose what is best for them in a given moment without judgment or comparison (Pantalone interview 2017). Andrade explained that a central focus of trauma-sensitive yoga is introspection: participants are invited to “go inward” and understand the various emotions and feelings present within them as a means to build resilience in their own life and reclaim agency in a way that might not have been possible during experiences of trauma (Andrade interview 2017).

Similar to the organization *Feet on the Ground*, Dunna uses invitational language and provides several options to participants to increase feelings of safety (López interview 2018). For example, if yoga classes are not designed using a trauma-sensitive approach and geared toward vulnerable populations, certain aspects of classes, such as *pranayama* or breathing could be triggering and agitating, rather than calming and restorative. She explained:

For example, not making participants close their eyes, not touching the people...these things are from trauma sensitive yoga, but we already did this at Dunna [before undergoing extensive trauma-sensitive training]. Because Satyananda Yoga has all those aspects also, they are very similar. What we are incorporating now is for example that you can choose to do things or not, giving people the opportunity to choose what they want. It is all about language. ‘You can do this if you feel comfortable, if you don't feel comfortable you can do this other thing... and if you don't want to do this other thing, just don't do it. You just do what you feel comfortable with.’ We don’t want to force anything, and we give them at least three options for certain *āsanas* that we know are delicate. So, trauma-sensitive yoga is shifting the language of how you give instructions, how you give them the choice to choose what they want (López interview 2017b).

Similarly, I discussed this with María Donadio, a professor in Modern Languages at the University of Los Andes based in Medellín, who both teaches yoga for Dunna and has designed yoga programming for the organization since 2012. She explained that when participants get triggered, they may shut down emotionally and want to leave the program (Donadio interview 2017). They warn participants of these factors beforehand, reassuring
them that these feelings are a normal, albeit difficult, part of doing the inner work of yoga (Donadio interview 2017):

Well, like it’s they start feeling better, but they also start facing a lot of things that they haven’t seen, or they don’t want to face in their life, and that is very challenging. So, they might want to stop the practice, or not come to class. But we know that in advance, so we try to address that and let people know that that is normal in the process and encourage them to continue (Donadio interview 2017).

In some projects, additional therapeutic offerings are offered to participants alongside the program for this very reason: “when we have the project here with demobilized people, yes, we do have a psychotherapist… so they can talk to her” (Donadio interview 2017).

Dunna’s work on trauma-centered yoga is informed by the work of the Trauma Center in Boston and trauma-sensitive yoga more broadly. From extensive research in the field of trauma, coupled with knowledge about Colombia and the conflict, Dunna’s founders knew they wanted an ‘integral’ or holistic approach which integrated both the mind and body (López interview 2017b). Gabriela Martínez of Dunna explained that because trauma is stored in the ‘reptilian’ part of the brain, which is reactionary, basic, and largely nonverbal, traditional talk-only or -based therapy is a limited method to address complex cases; instead, an integrated therapeutic approach is required (Martínez interview 2017). María Donadio agreed, stating that the body-based nature of yoga can offer participants an outlet to process things that are going in in their life, their body, in their lived experience. She explained that,

it’s not about theory, it’s about experience and they themselves manifest that. Like in comparison to the psychotherapy they receive, they see a lot of evolution in their process. That they can let go of negative emotions, that it’s real, that they can see the effects. You can see the transformation (Donadio interview 2018).

Moreover, Maria Adelaida López explained that many aspects of trauma relate to the unconscious mind and nervous system and may not be easily accessible by talk-therapy alone (López interview 2018). After experiencing some form of trauma, the brain may activate a fight-or-flight response, originating in the amygdala, and this response has very physiological effects such as pain, panic, fear, fast heart rate, and anxiety—and generally requires an intervention as complex as the trauma response, which also means the body (López interview 2017b).
6.2 Culturally appropriate and accessible yoga

6.2.1 Programmatic considerations

On a broad scale, although Dunna has done thorough research on yoga projects globally, such as initiatives within the Australian prison system, they have discovered that what works elsewhere may not resonate in the same way in the Colombian context (Donadio interview 2018). Thus, in developing their programming, they believed it was imperative that they use a bottom-up approach: “we know our country, we know our people and we know what works best. This is how we are building our project by taking knowledge from other projects [globally] while adjusting everything to this particular situation” (Donadio interview 2018). Dunna’s staff and yoga instructors frequently discussed with me the need to localize yoga offerings and root them in the needs of the community. We also discussed the critical nuance between adapting a yogic practice to a specific population to enhance their healing and changing the practice in a way that diverts from essential values or components of the practice, thereby transforming it into something new. This conversation stems largely from the mass popularization of yoga and the ongoing debate in yoga scholarship, introduced in Chapter 2, which grapples with greater access to ancient knowledge and techniques on the one hand, and the evolution of the practice as a result of its global spread, as well as new meanings it has taken on, on the other. Looking at how

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2 Emily Pantalone of Feet on the Ground agreed that it is critical to question the suitability of methods when applying them to different populations and work diligently to adapt and curate to fit the needs of specific groups rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach (Pantalone interview 2017). Moreover, Feet on the Ground has found that in some contexts, such as in their work in Sudan, it was beneficial (based on participant input) to separate participants by gender, whereas in their work in Afghanistan, men and women practicing together was a better fit (Andrade interview 2017). As with ongoing debates globally around yoga studios, and shared learning spaces more broadly, it is impossible to guarantee a safe space because it is impossible to fully anticipate what will trigger someone’s trauma. Nevertheless, considerations can be made. Pantalone provided examples, saying: “If I am working in a context where yoga really does have a strong religious connotation, I might never choose that students put their hands together in a prayer kind of shape—even if I don't mean it to be religious, they might. Or if I am working with a veteran population, I might choose not to talk about imagery that might send veterans back into the kind of field where they just were. For example, with Vietnam veterans, I wouldn’t talk about rain, or trees as part of guided imagery” (Pantalone interview 2017). Once that is determined, it is important to figure out how to best cater to the population with which one is working, asking questions such as: “is yoga the right word to use? Does that have a religious connotation?” and determining what trauma-sensitive considerations can be made such as how to set up the learning space and what types of movements are appropriate (Pantalone interview 2017).
yoga has manifested globally points to the risks of culturally appropriating and disrespecting aspects of the practice. 

Ignacio Zuleta explained that Dunna works within the context of this complexity by making small adaptations, largely in terms of language and terminology to increase accessibility to their participants, while keeping the foundations of Satyananda unchanged (Zuleta interview 2017). Dunna yoga instructor Viviana Jaramillo, a yoga teacher from Minca, a small village in the jungle mountains of the Sierra Nevada outside of Santa Marta, added that sometimes dance or the incorporation of more dynamic movements has been effective in Afro-Colombian populations: “I think depending on the areas I will make the yoga more dynamic or more like the Satyananda way, since in the coast of Colombia it sometimes becomes too quiet for the people” (Jaramillo interview 2017). Beyond that, instructors are faithful to the class design of Satyananda yoga, which is very traditional and follows a structured format. This method, Zuleta explained, is not as popular or “as famous as Iyengar, vinyasa or hot yoga, but at the same time we know the basic principles work for everyone. It is just a matter of telling people these are the basics” (Zuleta interview 2017).

Concerning the cultural appropriateness of yoga, Dunna believes it is important to train local teachers in a given community, as they often have the best knowledge of what works for a community and culture, such as what type of breathwork or movements might be useful and relatable (and thus more effective). A key part of making yoga offerings localized and culturally appropriate is to offer training to locals in communities across Colombia. López also explained how these considerations greatly factor in to concerns around project longevity and sustainability:

we used to have five-six months projects, and now we are shifting to have minimum nine months to one and a half year projects, because we want to make a strategy that creates sustainability. We also are doing more teacher training courses and having the opportunity to make these people to begin to replicate the strategy locally (López interview 2017b).

During my stay in Colombia, Dunna successfully carried out teacher training sessions across the country and I interviewed some of their participants in both Santa Marta and Tunja. At the time, more than 40 participants in Santa Marta had been trained and certified as teachers (Cortés interview 2018). In Tunja, in addition to youth inmates completing the
yoga teacher training, some staff participated to assist with sustainability and to be able to help program participants with yoga off the mat and institutionalize the teachings of yoga into the everyday workings of the detention center (López interview 2017a; Bernal interview 2017).

In Medellín, specifically, María Donadio has developed curriculum for and taught within programs for demobilized people—from both guerrilla and paramilitary groups—to address symptoms of complex trauma. When we spoke, they were in the beginning phases of new programming focused on women from rural areas and women who have experienced abuse in Medellín (Donadio interview 2018). She explained to me how Dunna intricately curates curriculum tailored to the needs and qualities of a given population, such as any psychological issues or sensitivities (Donadio interview 2018). Working with populations with a history of aggressive behaviour, or those who have experienced trauma as a result of aggressive behaviour, for example, takes careful consideration. Dunna works to create a “safe environment” in which participants can process these emotions and account for a variety of physical and emotional reactions participants may have such as an emotional outburst or upset (Donadio interview 2018). Donadio also explained to me the critical need for creativity and flexibility in design. Something that works for one population might not for another, and she has found that some groups are more difficult to work with than others. For example, though the yoga programming has been very effective with youth offenders, they are one of the more challenging groups to work with and are prone to react aggressively or disengage from the material (Donadio interview 2018):

we have to be very careful with the effects of the practices on people, because there are psychological issues involved, so we really want them to be safe, so we take into account what effects do the practices have in people, and if we want to cause that or not. It’s like we have to address other things in class that are difficult: people’s reactions, they might be aggressive, or they break down, so we need to be prepared to handle those situations. To start, we need get to know a little bit about their background (Donadio interview 2018).

Adaptations are also made based on the needs of specific populations (e.g., sexual assault survivors, demobilizing persons) and their multifaceted needs and are informed by trauma-sensitive yoga guidelines and literature, in addition to being rooted in Satyananda traditions. For example, options such as whether to sit on a chair, to lie on the floor, to keep
eyes open may be offered, as well as broader considerations such as meeting in a circle rather than in rows or to sit with one’s back against the wall to increase feelings of security.

6.2.2 Logistical considerations

Another critical topic raised by several of Dunna’s staff and others working in related fields was the need to ensure the financial accessibility of yoga to participants. Many participants come from low socio-economic backgrounds and have low educational attainment and few opportunities for social mobility (Restrepo interview 2017). María Eugenia Restrepo explained:

> Well, I have a yoga center, I also teach classes in my yoga center but all these projects [Dunna’s projects] are very nice because it is not to bring yoga to a person who wants to register and pay, is to reach an audience that is already difficult. But for me it is a challenge, and it is a challenge because it is to show them that they already have a prevention with yoga because many of those families [are] stratum zero, stratum one… Then it is a challenge, first show them that yoga are techniques for physical health, emotional and mental health” (Restrepo interview 2017).

Viviana Jaramillo explained how she was first drawn to yoga as a method for self-healing and something she knew she wanted to teach to others. She was especially interested in the applicability of the practice to those in the hard-hit and rural regions of her country and saw her practice as a way to give back to her community by offering yoga as a free service (Jaramillo interview 2017). Ignacio Zuleta also recognized that the yoga he teaches in Colombia is to an elite audience and not affordable to everyone, and out of both passion and a personal sense of service, he got involved in community programs like Dunna’s as a way to bring yoga to another subset of the population (Zuleta interview 2017).

Many of Dunna’s participants would have little access to something like yoga outside of these free programs due to extremely high participation fees in private yoga studios, since most yoga offerings in Colombia are also largely in urban centers in wealthier neighborhoods (Quiñones, López and Lefurgey 2018a, 23). In our collaborative research article, “Yoga, Social Justice, and Healing the Wounds of Violence in Colombia,” a research output of my fellowship with Dunna, we explored these questions of class and inequality more deeply:
Much of the yoga landscape in Colombia conforms to mainstream trends with several offerings from high-end studios with classes ranging from $30,000-45,000 pesos per class, which is roughly $10-16 USD. It is also common to find private classes that range from $100,000-$150,000, which are roughly $36-54 USD. Hence, in a country where the minimum wage is 737,717 pesos, or $246 USD per month, yoga remains marketed to and consumed by those within the elite strata of Colombian society. Further, as with trends in the Global North, much of the yoga being offered are āsana-based and exercise focused and serve as another element of class-based gatekeeping with high participation fees, exclusive locations, and an ideal fit-slim-white aesthetic maintained by the most famous yoga teachers in the country (Quiñones, López, and Lefurgey 2018a, 23).

Camila Diaz of RESPIRA agreed, speaking to the risk of commercialization in yoga and mindfulness spaces in the Colombian context and more broadly:

So… I think that’s very important, because it’s happening. It's becoming this mainstream thing, and I wish than more, and more, and more people around the world really, really could use, and understand, and practice this practice, but also being careful with how you are working with this, and that it doesn’t become this kind of luxurious product. Because it doesn’t come from there; it’s not that, it’s not about that. So, I think that’s very important also (Díaz Pabón 2018).

In addition to class, education and language accessibility considerations, programs at Dunna are also adapted based on other demographic considerations such as rural/urban experience, race/ethnicity, cultural norms of a given community and gender relations. Viviana Jaramillo discussed this and said she felt that yoga could be beneficial across Colombia and also in other countries as a method of peacebuilding if organizers continue to make the offerings dynamic and catered to the cultural context of various regions (Jaramillo interview 2018). This often means simplifying yoga terminology and the use of Sanskrit terms, and also the use of complex medical physiology descriptions. Dunna’s classes are also taught in Spanish, using local expressions and relatable language (Zuleta interview 2017).

Beyond the complication of terms and language barriers, religion is a key reason for yoga session adaptations. Ignacio Zuleta explained that Dunna has strategies to offer classes in accessible ways that focus on exercise, breathing, and relaxation without the use of philosophical yivic concepts because there is a high prevalence of misconception and worry surrounding yoga’s religious ties in many populations (Zuleta interview 2017). He explained that classes are approached with the underpinnings of traditional yoga and the
goal of mental peace. Zuleta feels that this balance and the careful articulation of Dunna’s offerings allows participants to reap the benefits of the practice while meeting them where they are at—gradually introducing them to what yoga is (Zuleta interview 2017). Another area where accessibility is a concern is with the physical body itself. Zuleta explains that:

to manage how your mind works through the body also but is not physically centered, it has no the thing that to do yoga you have to be extremely flexible ore you have to be very strong. So, it’s a very accessible yoga for everyone, we don’t try to discriminate, it’s not a yoga that will do hand stands on the third class. The teachers at Satyananda [and Dunna] are very well trained and they have to do their own practice for two years before they become instructors, not two months, that is the usual case so it’s a very strict tradition in that sense you cannot improvise (Zuleta interview 2017).

When participants did have reservations and preconceptions about yoga before programs began, often they interpreted yoga as a religious offering (Jaramillo interview 2018; Restrepo interview 2018; Zuleta interview 2017; and Donadio interview 2018). Some participants saw yoga as a personal spiritual practice that could complement their own religious practices and values. Others were initially turned off by the practice due to preconceived ideas and understandings of yoga as a religious practice inherently different to their own and, in some cases, a practice they deemed to be evil and anti-Christian (Zuleta interview 2017). Fernando Cortés agreed, saying that “the most important challenge would be the cultural aspect of what yoga is perceived as,” stating that continuing to work in ways that are accessible and partnering with entities like the federal government has been helpful in offering a level of credibility in the eyes of potential participants (Cortéz interview 2018). One of Dunna’s yoga instructors, María Eugenia Restrepo, who has her own studio in Bogotá but also teaches for Dunna in the community of Tunal, explained that many participants she has worked with believe that “yoga is of the devil, that yoga is religious, that yoga is bad” (Restrepo interview 2018). She explained that the challenge in trying to reach a difficult audience, in contrast to her studio practice, where people eagerly sign up and pay for classes, is part of what drew her to Dunna’s work (Restrepo interview 2018). Showing participants or potential participants the physical, emotional, and mental benefits of yoga and how they can integrate yoga in a way that complements their existing belief system or religion has been very gratifying for Restrepo, who frequently works with people from some of Colombia’s most vulnerable social groups (Restrepo interview 2018).
In rare cases, participants have left Dunna’s yoga programs because of the pressure from family members—in these cases, misconceptions of the practice in contrast to their religion governed those decisions. However, in general, participants have been curious, and skepticism fades once they begin to experience the benefits for themselves and witness changes in their bodies and lives (Ochoa interview 2017). Dunna yoga instructor Margarita Ochoa explained that she tries to clarify misconceptions about yoga at the beginning of each program and articulates that “yoga is a science, and it has been proved that it has effect on this, and this, and this aspect of life. Yoga is something you can do by yourself; you don't need the teacher forever. You learn the tools and then you can use it on your own behalf” (Ochoa interview 2017). RESPIRA, which also works with practices that could be interpreted as spiritual or that have a spiritual basis, also reported experiencing resistance and chose to present their tools as aimed for well-being and for cultivating self-compassion rather than as spiritual or religious (Díaz Samper interview 2017).

In interviewing participants in several of Dunna’s projects in different regions of Colombia, I also frequently heard from participants about their thoughts on religion or the tensions they experienced regarding this aspect of yoga. For example, one woman explained: “I’ve heard before that yoga was a religion thing and I didn’t like that until one day I went to the park [and] yoga was performed, the same that we did today. I liked it, that relaxed me a lot. I felt like new, I felt like my heart was cleaned of all the stress that you carry for many years” (Participant 8, Tunal, interview 2017). Another said that she had heard yoga was “bad and that it was a religion,” but when she went to a presentation by Dunna in her housing complex, she learned of the mental, physical, and social benefits and decided to give it a chance (Participant 12, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Similarly, one woman explained the need to overcome the stigma of yoga in communities like hers, Ciudad Equidad, by carefully explaining the benefits of the practice and debunking religious myths:

Many people right now have a different knowledge of what yoga really is and that is why such people do not come because they have evil concepts of yoga and that's why they do not come, but if you go from home to home and mentions yoga benefits, that every exercise you do with your body serves, for instance, for the respiratory system, that one with the respiratory techniques oxygenates the brain, the internal organs are massaged. People will start coming to yoga and they change
their way of thinking because even I was a very explosive person before reaching yoga but thanks God, I am another person now (Participant 11, Santa Marta, interview 2017).

Another participant, a single mother displaced by the conflict from her hometown of Santa Rosa to Santa Marta where I interviewed her, explained that attending yoga classes was initially a source of conflict between her and her children (Participant 14, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Her children initially said were not in support of her doing yoga:

I already had conflicts with my children, it was already very rough. They told me that yoga is a waste of time that is witchcraft and I still wanted to know. Well actually if it hasn’t served me, I would have not put so much effort… because I am a mother, a head of family, sometimes I come tired, I do not want to relax, I do not want to do anything, I go to bed at once. So yes, it has helped me, even though my children make fun of me, even though they tell me, Mommy, when you are in it, you seem relax (Participant 14, Santa Marta, interview 2017).

Now, she utilizes yoga not only to control her temper and emotions, but she is trying now to guide her children to follow in her footsteps (Participant 14, Santa Marta, interview 2017).

Interviewees also noted interesting reflections in terms of access to yoga/preconceptions of yoga based on gender. In general, a focus on gender equality and exploring masculinity was of interest amongst interviewees (Natalia Quiñones interview 2018; Orjuela Garcia interview 2018; López interview 2017b; Zuleta interview 2017; Lyons interview 2018; Salcedo interview 2018; Castro interview 2017; and Collazos Ardila interview 2017) and was embedded in the work of many organizations in Colombia that I spoke with, yet ultimately wasn’t a central focus of discussion. Interestingly, in several cases Dunna staff and yoga instructors reported that often there were few preconceived ideas or stereotypes of what yoga was before projects in communities began, such as with the group of male

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3 For example, in line with Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy, the Embassy of Canada to Colombia strives to empower women and girls and promote gender equality and address critical issues such as violence against women and girls (Lyons interview 2018). As part of this goal, they are working with the organization Profamilia, the leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services in Colombia. Together, they are collaborating on a project that promotes comprehensive education on sexuality, which Ariel-Ann Lyons described as a difficult topic in Colombia but a critical one on which Canada must have a stance (Lyons interview 2018). Additionally, several of the embassy’s initiatives in the education sector work to imagine new masculinities and address ‘machismo’ culture (Salcedo interview 2018).
youth offenders in Tunja that was completing a yoga teacher training program (Bernal interview 2017). This was particularly true in very rural contexts or among demobilized populations who spent years in the jungle and were disconnected from civilian life, providing them little access to popular culture trends. As such, gender and ideas of masculinity were not a major barrier to participation. This is notable and significant when considering masculinity norms as a barrier to taking up the practice as discussed in Chapters 2-3.

Dunna staff reported that many demobilizing men have found the space to be therapeutic and an outlet in which to cope with their trauma, often showing a release of emotion in yoga classes and using the space to process and cope with difficult experiences from their past (López interview 2017b). However, Dunna staff did note that women were more likely to freely sign up for their yoga programs, while men were often involved as part of a specific program, such as through the military or demobilization projects (Zuleta interview 2017). Dunna’s Research Director and Co-Founder Natalia Quiñones also noted though, that beyond the gendered questions surrounding yoga and preconceived ideas surrounding the practice that machismo culture in Colombia is rife and has been a foundational part of the armed conflict. In the Colombian context, “being a man is very much equated to being violent and strong, in most of the country... where beating your wife or your family in general makes you more of a man” (Quiñones interview 2018).

As part of Dunna’s efforts to cultivate peace on individual and collective levels, they work not only to empower women, but to also envision new masculinities and forge new, healthier gendered relations within (Quiñones interview 2018). Quiñones explained that Dunna works with communities to discuss gender relations and how they play out in the community. Together, people of different genders have the ability to envision new ways forward and develop social contracts that get passed on to the next generation (Quiñones interview 2018). These conversations about the values of equality have informed community-based agreements and, in some cases, have been enforced by a peace judge in the communities where Dunna works (Quiñones interview 2018). Dunna has been integral to these conversations and have been part of community initiatives facilitating narratives of non-violence and gender equality through painting community murals as reminders of
these agreements (Quiñones interview 2018). Yoga has been utilized as a particularly important tool in this pursuit, as Dunna’s programming, and the pedagogy of yoga practice, prioritizes strength, not over another, but over one’s own emotions and mindset (Quiñones interview 2018).

Given these understandings of yoga in Colombia and within the specific populations Dunna serves, it is important to consider exactly how these offerings are different from mainstream global ideas of yoga. More importantly, it is important to interrogate how this translates to peacebuilding efforts, on both individual and collective levels. Participants in this research project explained their experiences in Dunna’s classes/programs and their relationship to yoga as a practice in a myriad of ways. How yoga is experienced by those participating within the Dunna framework can be categorized into two broad categories: the collective and the individual, both of which interrelate and interconnect on several themes. The collective encapsulates the ways in which yoga impacts the relational and social nature of people, both in how it fosters community and connection, and in how it can impact our actions and reactions within interpersonal relations. The collective in this context can be discussed further as falling into one of two categories: social/communal and relational/interpersonal. Moreover, in relation to the individual potentials of yoga, participants reported several indicators that can be broadly categorized into physical and emotional/psychological. Many reflections participants provided also spoke to a strong mind/body relationship and the idea that something such as a physical ailment can both impact and be impacted by psychological and emotional factors and vice versa.

6.3 Collective peacebuilding

6.3.1 Social and communal benefits

Many Dunna staff and participants discussed the collective and community-level benefits of yoga. Interviewees found that yoga was helpful in transforming conflicts, building trust, and learning to co-exist where worldviews varied widely. Following Dunna’s yoga training and programs, many participants reported less anger and conflict, as well as better interactions with their neighbours and family (for example: Participant 9, Tunal, interview
2017; Group Participant 2 Bosa, interview 2018; Participant 1, Tunal, group interview 2018; Group Participant 1, Ibagué, interview 2018). Many also saw yoga as a positive outlet in the ongoing peace process (Participant 11, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Dunna frequently used the term “coexistence” and sees this as a key goal of its programming; participants’ positive feedback seems to confirm this.

In many respects, yoga was an opportunity for Dunna’s participants to connect with others and socialize, yet its effects reach much further. For example, some participants found yoga to be a tool to build compassion and understanding for the lived experiences of others—arguably a key tenant of reconciliatory and rehabilitative work (Tunal Group interview 2017). One participant explained that yoga can help bring people with opposing and often polarizing views together and enable them to find common ground: “if we can all agree and help each other, as you know not everyone is the same or thinks the same as others. In this sense, maybe [yoga] could help. As you know, in Colombia the going is hard” (Participant 9, Tunal, interview 2017). She explained how her own experience in Dunna’s yoga program was a great start for building peace from the ground up—working on the individual self as well as on basic social bonds (Participant 9, Tunal, interview 2017). Another explained how yoga for her is an inclusive space and an outlet for coping with racism and social alienation as an Afro-Colombian from the Coast living in Bosa (Participant 2, Group Bosa, interview 2018).

Dunna yoga instructor Viviana Jaramillo explained that, on an individual level, yoga aids in helping a person to pause before reacting violently, which, in turn, has the capacity to impact the prevalence of violence in communities (Jaramillo interview 2017). She has personally witnessed yoga as a space that brings people with different histories, lived experiences, and impressions of the peace process together for a common practice (Jaramillo interview 2017). Ignacio Zuleta echoed these ripple effects of experiencing inner peace and how individual peace can have effects on family, social relations, and, as a result, the makeup of societies (Zuleta interview 2017). Dunna believes that working on an individual level translates to communal and societal levels and values of coexistence, a deeper understanding of the other, and compassion which they deem to be critical to sustainable peace (López interview 2017b). As such, Dunna’s work in several communities
aims to rebuild broken social fabrics that have been fractured by war, poverty, and inequality. Many communities where I conducted interviews, like Cuidad Equidad, a social housing complex in Santa Marta, for example, are made up almost entirely of victims of the conflict or demobilized persons and face complex social and personal challenges (López interview 2017b).

Participants in Tunal reported during a group interview that they had not anticipated the community-based and social benefits from participating in the yoga training (Group Participants, Tunal, interview 2018). They discussed, as a group, the benefits of getting to know their neighbours, with one participant sharing, “it is like it generates more trust among people” (Group Participant 1, Tunal, interview 2018). Several Dunna participants discussed not knowing their neighbours prior to the yoga class and saw yoga as a very beneficial way to break the ice and build community (Group Participants, Tunal, interview 2018; Group Participants, Bosa, interview 2018; Group Participants, Ibagué, interview 2018). A participant from Ibagué explained that “sometimes we live stuck in our house, and we don’t even say hello to our neighbor. This is somewhat normal in our modern world, so here the idea is that we want to get closer, we want to create union and social cohesion” (Group Participant 1, Ibagué, interview 2018).

Two women interviewed in Tunal in November 2017 noted that they had witnessed big changes in their community and felt that residents of the housing complex seemed less angry (Participant 13, Tunal, interview 2017; Participant 12, Tunal, interview 2017). Another explained that yoga helped her cultivate the idea of service and allowed her to see beyond herself and her family unit and seek out meaningful connection in her community (Group Participant 12, Tunal, interview 2018). In Bosa, participants also explained that the environment of their housing complex was sometimes violent, and that they could often hear disputes or domestic violence outside or through their walls (Group Bosa, interview 2018). One participant said she uses yoga as a means to cope with this and accepts that beyond calling the police to report, the situation is out of her control. She felt empowered to have the tool of yoga to cultivate a sense of peace within her home amidst any chaos around her in the housing complex (Group Participant 6, Bosa, interview 2018). Another
found that she was less reactive to neighbours and that yoga has been helpful in dealing with interpersonal conflicts:

Personally, it has been very helpful, I have felt a lot of peace, a lot of calmness. I feel good, it feels good to come here and do all this. I have learned a lot about breathing, I have learned to calm myself. I also personally have some problems with a neighbor, she constantly picks on me, so I’ve tried to leave her alone, not to respond to what she might say. I have tried to keep away from conflict and instead to calm myself, to let things happen (Group Participant 2, Bosa, interview 2018).

Moreover, in addition to group-setting interviews, participants from Dunna’s yoga projects at social housing compounds in Tunal and Santa Marta were interviewed individually and asked about what role yoga could take in broader peacebuilding efforts across the country. All participants interviewed in Tunal said that they felt that yoga being institutionalized and more widely practiced in Colombia as a tool for peace would be useful, stating the positive effects that yoga can have on building trust and happiness in communities (Group participants 11, 12, 13, 9, Tunal, interview 2017), as well as the critical impact the practice can have on youth (Participant 11, Tunal, interview 2017). One interviewee said she wasn’t sure how or if yoga could be a tool for peacebuilding at a national scale but felt optimistic that yoga fostered inner peace, which she felt impacted society broadly (Participant 10, Tunal, interview 2017).

Participants in Santa Marta offered similar responses on the topic. One woman spoke about the social benefits of yoga, explaining how incorporating yoga as part of the peace process would make people aware that they can be better contributors to the society, developing both spiritually and morally as people (Participant 7, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Another explained yoga’s ability to help with the culture of intolerance and polarization surrounding the peace process because of how yoga can change a person’s mind and worldview (Participant 12, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Similarly, a participant in Dunna’s programs in Santa Marta told us that she believes yoga can help on community and national levels, and that she believes that this is primarily achieved by starting with one’s own awareness (Participant 11, Santa Marta, interview 2017). She further explained in saying: “if you go to yoga and you are not focused on what is, you are not really doing yoga. You always have to be focused on the mind, your breathing and your consciousness.
Yoga offers presence and this I believe is peace” (Participant 11, Santa Marta, interview 2017).

Dunna yoga instructor Margarita Ochoa believes that yoga can have a profound effect on people in ways that are not cosmetic or superficial; rather, the changes that Ochoa has observed help people confront themselves and their lived experiences in both weaknesses and strengths. She explained that, given the more than fifty years of war in Colombia, a great challenge for rehabilitation and post-conflict programs is the difficulty in statistically quantifying their impacts. However, through the practice of yoga, small and important seeds are planted:

[yoga] does contribute to peace, especially when you deal with people who have been victims of war, because they are open-hearted, they are open to improve, to have a better quality of life instead of perpetuating more violence and anger, and sadness. They can really step out of this reality with the tools that yoga gives them. But it’s a long process, and you have to start somewhere with little efforts on a small community level. That’s why Dunna is trying not only to do yoga classes but are preparing and forming teachers in those communities. They don’t only attend the classes, and go to the program, but from those groups can become new teachers. Then they can have an income and also start to share their experience and to teach the method of yoga. I think that’s the contribution of Satyananda Yoga and Dunna to peace in Colombia (Ochoa interview 2017).

Santa Marta-based Dunna yoga instructor Viviana Jaramillo echoed this in saying:

I think [yoga] gives tools for daily life that is the basic space where we need to change; the only fact of thinking over before we react with violence is a big change…I think [the peace process] is a very complex process that needs to start by changing people’s minds. As long as we think that violence or military interventions will change our country peace cannot happen. Also, I think we need more opportunities in the countryside to stop men and women coming into the army as a way to have a better life (Jaramillo interview 2020).

6.3.2 Relational and Interpersonal benefits

Dunna’s yoga participants reported that, in addition to broader peacebuilding and the facilitation of social cohesion in communities, yoga has had a positive spillover effects on family and relationships. One woman explained to us that she felt yoga was important in her community, especially for the mothers who take on most of the childcare and homecare duties within families (Participant 7, Tunal, interview 2017). She explained how yoga
offers these participants something for themselves and serves as an outlet to cope with daily stressors, in turn having a positive effect on the family unit (Participant 7, Tunal, interview 2017). A participant in Tunal, when asked if her participation in Dunna’s yoga project could help her family, shared that yoga could be a bonding activity at home and a way to have her children do something beyond technology:

Actually, yes because that was the first thing I thought, especially my two sons. One is a teenager of 14 years, where, as you know, the hormones are present… and also the mobile phone— that all they want is to be there. And the little one that is beginning and is only 10 years old. So, the first thing that came into my mind is that when I’m more experienced in the topic I’m going to do it at home because, I mean they aren’t rebels, but they are all the time on the internet (Participant 7, Tunal, interview 2017).

Relational benefits such as an increased ability to cope with anger and reactive responses with spouses and family members were widely reported. For example, one participant explained, “[yoga] was very useful in helping me relax with my husband. We were fighting like cats and dogs. I would lash out at every little thing, but I’ve changed a lot” (Group Participant 5, Tunal, interview 2018). Another agreed and spoke of her family dynamics and how they have improved since learning the foundations of yoga: “overall our relationship, our family relationship is better. Now if [my children] see me scream they say to me: Mom, don’t scream, take a deep breath... Because before it was only screaming and scolding. The emotional issues in our family have changed a lot” (Group Participant 9, Tunal, interview 2018). Similarly, a woman explained that yoga has helped her the most with her tendency to overreact and her prior tendency to approach situations with anger (Participant 10, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Others taught yoga to their kids and shared in the practice together as a family activity (Group Tunal, interview 2018; Group Bosa, interview 2018; Group Ibagué, interview 2018). One young man, attending the group interview with his mother, explained, “well, my mom always tells me ‘son you have to be conscious about your mind, your breathing, your vocalization’” (Group Participant 4, Ibagué, interview 2018).

Another participant explained how yoga helped with reactivity and parenting her young child:
I have a two-year-old baby, Alejandro. He is my life, but he’s difficult to manage. At some point we were in a constant battle… Even though I never mistreat him, sometimes I get to this point where I can’t take it anymore and you just blow up, perhaps by screaming. So, this program has helped a lot, for example when he is in that space of rebelling against mom, I just breathe and that helps me a lot to calms down. And I just leave it like that. So yes, [yoga] has been very helpful (Group Participant 3, Bosa, interview 2018).

Another participant in Bosa agreed and found that yoga allowed her to breathe and pause before reacting:

The truth is, yoga has been very helpful from the first day. Especially it has helped me to be aware of my mistakes and improve them, that’s the most important thing. Something happened the first day of class. I got to the front desk and a lady started to say, ‘I’m a member of the board’, kind of attacking me. In another time I would’ve responded by attacking back, but I didn’t do it. I felt such peace, such calmness that what I did was talking to her. She immediately calmed down (Group Participant 4, Bosa, interview 2018).

A woman originally from El Dificil, called Magdalena, who joined the yoga program out of curiosity after seeing yoga on TV, explained that she, too, used to be a very ‘explosive person’ and has learned, though yoga, to be more patient and to take a breath before reacting (Participant 10, Santa Marta, interview 2017). Similarly, in Ibagué, participants found relief from yoga in controlling emotional and violent outbursts:

I had this situation with my husband where he would say the slightest thing and I would get upset, but not anymore… Because I used to be a very short fuse person. He would say something, and I would answer in a very rude way right away. But not now, now he says or does something and I just let things happen, I breathe, and I don’t feel that energy that I was talking about, like that anger where I would feel like I wanted to smash him against the wall. I don’t feel that anymore. Well, it is still there but not so much anymore, not with the same intensity (Group Participant 3, Ibagué, interview 2018).

Though the ‘peace beginning within’ concept can sound cliché, María Adelaida López explained that without the tools to self-regulate, it remains difficult to stop cycles of reactivity and violence, which remain barriers to peaceful coexistence and rebuilding social fabrics (López interview 2017b). Moreover, she explained that it is difficult to trust others, and to build peace outward begins first with self-trust and self-regulation (López interview 2017b).
6.4 Individual peacebuilding

When interviewees were asked about yoga’s potential as a tool for community or country-wide peacebuilding, a common reply was that building peace individually would have a ripple effect on broader social structures. This suggests that, based on the lived experience of interviewees, the individual and the collective interrelate and inform one another. For example, Dunna yoga instructor María Eugenia Restrepo explained that to cultivate peace on community, family, or social levels, individuals must be able to first experience peace within themselves. She explained that peace is to accomplish inner and outer balance and that a key vehicle to accomplish this state of balance or harmony is through “breathing, meditating and body quietness”—all offerings of a yoga practice offered with Dunna (Restrepo interview 2018). A middle-aged pre-school teacher living in Bogotá’s Tunal suburb also encapsulated this sentiment when she said, “I think that the first thing you need to build peace on the exterior, is to first build your interior. If you aren’t in peace with yourself, you won’t be able to share that peace with other people” (Participant 7, Tunal, 2018).

Yoga instructor Viviana Jaramillo discussed with me how she saw students in her classes transform their lives through the practice and felt that Dunna’s yoga programs offered participants access to resources that they did not otherwise have access to (Jaramillo interview 2017). The breathing techniques she taught were very impactful and something participants translated to their own lives—taking a moment to breathe and re-center amidst the turbulence of daily life (Jaramillo interview 2017). She also reported that yoga nīdra, or the guided relaxation/meditation component of the practice, was highly beneficial to participants as a tool to connect to their inner world and body and find relaxation and that these effects translated also to family and social structures (Jaramillo interview 2017).

Cali-based Dunna yoga instructor Ignacio Zuleta, explained that, on an individual level, many people in Colombia have lived and continue to live in a state of hypervigilance, which can result in experiences such as being easily reactive to stimulus, feeling on edge, tension in the body, disassociation, and anxiety (Zuleta interview 2017). Zuleta further explained that from his experience instructing in highly traumatized populations, Dunna’s yoga
participants learn to relax through the tools of yoga and, as a result, can cultivate feelings of peace and security in their bodies and surroundings (Zuleta interview 2017). However, there can be initial resistance to the process and challenges as participants navigate pre-conceptions and misconceptions of yoga and the role it can play in their lives. This reluctance is compounded by the potential that yoga itself has to trigger physiological reactions from the body and nervous system. Even simply postures like savāsana, in which participants lie flat on their back on the floor, may prompt symptoms of tension, anxiety, panic, flashbacks, or other physical, mental, or emotional reactions (Zuleta interview 2017).

6.4.1 Emotional and psychological benefits

Mental health was frequently discussed as a key concern by program organizers and participants (Quiñones interview 2018; López interview 2017a; López interview 2018; Rondón interview 2018). López explained that:

The public politics for mental health and for psychosocial attention it’s on the beginning, actually our national mental health plan, it came out only five years ago. Dunna was already underway when that happened, yet we didn’t even have a mental health policy in Colombia. And with the peace process all this things of mental health, social rehabilitation and in the mean like the social fabric and social tissue, it’s beginning to gain importance now (López interview 2017a).

She explained that following the peace accord, “you hear a politician talking about creating new buildings and making new roads… but you never hear a politician saying to the people I’m going to take care of you, as individuals” (López interview 2017a). As such, Dunna’s work has sought to help fill this gap.

I spoke with mental health expert Lena Rondón expressly about this complexity, as well as about Dunna’s role within promoting mental health for all Colombians. Rondón is an expert in psychosocial intervention and care as well as a professor at Los Andes University. She formerly worked for the Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation in the Department of Social Prosperity in Colombia, where she worked closely with Dunna to provide yoga interventions to various populations exposed to the war. Several of Dunna’s program participants also have the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or
exhibit a range of symptoms of complex trauma. In fact, PTSD was at the heart of Dunna’s initial research project that legitimized and institutionalized yoga for peacebuilding as a government funded approach in Colombia. Fernando Cortés of Bolivar-Davivienda Foundation, one of Dunna’s key funding partners explained the rigorous research conducted:

The initial results were successful, and we came back to the government to show them the project. And they said “great,” but we need better proof, so we said “okay, so let’s do it again.” We got a larger sample. The first sample was around 55, and then the second one was 220—the largest one in the world for these kinds of studies. So, we came back with this large sample, again we got the psychiatrist on board to prove that what we were doing also with Los Andes was scientifically correct. So, it was after that, that they finally said “ok, we believe in your methodology” … and we started working with ARN (government agency) and proving that this was a great initiative or method of reducing the post-traumatic stress syndrome (Cortés interview 2018).

Fernando Cortéz of the Bolivar-Davivienda Foundation agreed that mental health issues in Colombia are rife with the need for creative solutions—a key driver to becoming a main funding partner of Dunna’s mission. Cortéz believes yoga is a much-needed outlet for cultivating inner peace, and also for living in harmony given the widespread violence in Colombia for several decades (Cortéz interview 2018). Cortéz expressed that learning to respect opposing views and living harmoniously and in diversity is a critical part of the peace process and that yoga is an outlet for doing so while also focusing on improving individual mental health (Cortéz interview 2018). Their collaboration focused on the reintegration of ex-combatants and alleviating the suffering of victims of the conflict, including children in ten municipalities across Colombia (Rondón interview 2018). She reported that the collaborative work with Dunna yielded very important results:

It helped diminish the symptomatology of the victims, specifically on the symptom syndromes of anxiety and depression. Basically, yoga has contributed to mitigating the states of mental activation in victims of their recurrent thoughts that may be

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4 Findings from this research project can be found in a 2015 study entitled *Efficacy of a Satyananda Yoga Intervention for Reintegrating Adults Diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* led by Dunna and colleagues (Quiñones et al.). The research spoke to the widespread nature of PTSD in Colombia, specifically among ex-combatants from demobilizing illegal armed groups (estimated to be 37.5%) (Quiñones et al. 2015, 89). The results of this research informed the trajectory of peacebuilding in Colombia and assisted in institutionalizing yoga as a method in post-conflict.
linked to acts of or thought of violence. The yoga programs allowed for the extension of relationships of solidarity and support of those who were trained in yoga with the rest of their community. Also, it allowed people to replicate the use of yoga techniques with families and with the community to help calm states of irritability, especially the agitation and anxiety of victims of the conflict. Moreover, it permitted [participants] to quiet their states of irritability that the victims normally have such as being hyper-reactive to situations of tension they live in their normal lives (Rondón interview 2018).

Dunna’s Satyananda yoga classes offer participants an opportunity to feel and observe the body, emotions, and thoughts. When I asked how yoga achieves this and also how this method compares to other sports or arts-based methods used in peacebuilding, Natalia Quiñones explained that yoga’s introspective component and ability to bridge mind and body sets it apart (Quiñones interview 2018). She explained that Colombian society is largely externalized in the sense that there is a lot of comparison and resentment due to the hierarchies and structural inequalities embedded into Colombia’s social fabric:

It’s a society where everyone is very aware of what everyone else thinks of them and there is a lot of outward comparison. Yoga has helped participants look inward, for the first time in most of the cases and this is very, very, very powerful. Because when you push change from the inside outwards, the chances of those changes being permanent is much higher. Yoga gets you increased chances for change, because you are really changing the core of the individual, not just a habit or an outlet for creativity—you are changing the core of the mind, of the emotions, and even sometimes the body itself… You are rewiring the entire autonomic and sympathetic nervous system (Quiñones interview 2018).

Instructor Margarita Ochoa described that participants are often unaware of this rewiring process during the initial stages of program; they gain more understanding of yoga’s deep benefits later when they start to witness real change in their lives (Ochoa interview 2017). After a few weeks or sessions, she notes that participants begin to report experiences like “I’m sleeping better, my ailments, my tension, my headache disappeared... or the tensions in my body, or my back had always been hurting and I couldn’t even move. I feel better just by practicing yoga” or “I had that profound sadness, or anger, or fear and that starts to vanish, not disappear forever but the force or the energy of those feelings—they dissolved” (Ochoa interview 2017). She explained that receiving the benefits of yoga does not require an intellectualization of yoga or how it works, but rather is an embodied awareness of real shifts within themselves, which can be profound (Ochoa interview 2017).
A reoccurring theme in discussions surrounding complex trauma is yoga’s ability to calm the mind. More specifically, it is about yoga’s ability to root the mind in the present moment through bodily awareness, breathwork, and meditation rather than in preoccupied and often stressful thoughts about the past or even the future. When asked if yoga could be a useful tool to help process past, and potentially difficult, experiences as part of the peacebuilding process, a participant in Dunna’s housing project in Tunal replied: “I think yes, at the moment they make you remember, they say remember the past, so rapidly you remember and then you are back to reality with the breath, so you rest and you feel relieved. It tells my mind that the past is the past” (Participant 8, Tunal, 2018). Dunna yoga teacher Tatiana Bernal added that yoga draws on our full attention, requiring both mental focus and physical awareness, and that when yoga students develop this level of presence, they can more easily find calm and inner peace through an awareness of the present moment:

Because yoga is full attention, it is to be in the present moment. I think that when you are in the present moment you are calmed. If you are thinking in thousands of things the mind scatters itself and you lose peace. With yoga you are aware of every movement, every breath, every āsana and it brings inner peace (Bernal interview 2017).

Dunna yoga teacher Ignacio Zuleta agreed, and said that he often notices immediate changes in participants when they learn to be aware of their breath and, subsequently, be aware of the present moment (Zuleta interview 2017). He explained how profound it can be when someone brings awareness to their own breath, their own aliveness, in some cases for the first time:

Breathing is a basic part of every moment in life when you switch the awareness from the unconscious breathing to the conscious breathing. Physiologically, what you do is take [participants] out of the instinct part of the brain which is the cerebellum…When you do conscious breathing you go to the frontal lobe…Your brain waves are different, lots of things happen just because you are aware of your breath. Most of the people in this country have never gone into deep relaxation. Once they taste it, they understand that they can master themselves and their life through deep relaxation. Once they know it exists and it’s a possibility and it’s an experience (Zuleta interview 2017).

Sharing his observations of his own students, Zuleta offered that once breathing slows down, the mind also slows, and when yoga participants begin to feel less bombarded by their thoughts, they can begin to see these thoughts as separate from the essence that they
are. ‘You are not your mind’ is a common saying, “but unless you provide the experience of that, you cannot tell them intellectually ‘you are not your mind.’ They have to understand that they can watch their mind from a different point of view, which is slightly higher” (Zuleta interview 2017). Zuleta explains this as consciousness—a level of thought processing where you realize that “you are not your mind, you are not your thoughts, you are a being which has one component as a mind, but the mind is not necessarily what you are, so you don’t identify with your thoughts. You are then free of the movements of your mind…and you don’t have to believe what your mind tells you, allowing for freedom from compulsive, reactionary responses” (Zuleta interview 2017). This aspect of yoga goes beyond awareness of the physical body in space and relates to interoception or an awareness of the internal condition of the body. I asked María Adelaida López to further explain consciousness to me, as the term can be misunderstood, or vague, or thought to be something spiritual, religious, or esoteric. She proposed: “for us is very simple, it’s the ability to be aware of what is on your mind, what is in your heart, what is happening in your body; and to be able to observe it like an impartial observer, an impartial witness. To be able to be a witness of yourself, of your mind, body, and emotions without engaging with it” (López interview 2017b).

When asked about the transformative effects of yoga and what changes, if any, participants have witnessed in their lives, many reported on the emotional and behavioural benefits of the practice, such as increased awareness of their emotions. Participants reported feeling more in control and an increased ability to regulate difficult emotions (Participant 11, Tunal, interview 2017). A woman in Tunal explained that, through yoga, you “learn to control your emotions and to not get upset so easily” (Participant 11, Tunal, interview 2017). When asked if yoga could help her in her future, she extrapolated:

Let’s see, because at least I’m calmer, at least you stop thinking only on the physical part because you learn that you aren’t only body, you are more. We are always thinking about the money and the house—meaning pretending to be the richest ones on the graveyard. I’ve also learned [through yoga] that we came to this world to amend mistakes, because we’re here just passing by, we are tourists on this planet, so yes off course. At least that gives me peace and I know that I can evolve a little more (Participant 11, Tunal, interview 2017).
A common topic discussed was learning to tolerate or even accept difficult emotions such as anger or anxiety. Many also reported feeling relaxed and calm, finding the tools yoga offers as beneficial to calming busy minds and finding peace amongst the daily chaos of life, work, parenting, and so on (Participant 12, Tunal, interview 2017; Group Participant 2, Ibagué, interview 2018). For example, a participant in Ibagué noted:

It is good to be able to focus. Through yoga, I can see that I have been all over the place. My emotional outbursts, they’ve been very bad for me… This program has been so useful and today I look at things from a different perspective, with more serenity, with more calmness. I can look back and say that was silly (Group Participant 2, Ibagué, interview 2018).

Another participant in Tunal explained that she turned to yoga to deal with her work-related stress and that she felt yoga could benefit many in Colombia:

[Yoga] helps you even with your health. Yes, because the stress level here is awful, not just Colombia with the lack of jobs and opportunities but here in Ciudad Bolivar, it’s a hard place, there are some difficult zones and this helps you to be confident with yourself (Participant 12, Tunal, interview 2017).

María Donadio explained that participants are more aware of themselves and their emotions and have an enhanced consciousness about their past, including a deeper awareness of their suffering and how to overcome it. They also have more tools to manage their emotional and mental state and this is reflected outwards (Donadio interview 2018). For example, on the benefits of yoga for addressing anger, one participant reported:

the program has helped me with tolerance. For example, before I would lash out at everything at home. I was always stressed because of one thing or the other… I didn’t know how to act so I could do what I needed in the moment. But not right now, because I think first, if I’m overwhelmed, I have to wait. I have to do this or that that I learned at yoga. So, for me it has been very helpful (Participant 6, Tunal, interview 2018).

One woman spoke about how yoga helped her process difficult emotions and grief when her husband was sick and later passed away in the hospital. She explained how she struggled with tearfulness and anger, especially in response to him being negatively treated while in hospital care. The daily yoga practice she cultivated through participating with Dunna assisted with her coping: “I practiced every day, so I was making progress, and the breathing most of all. It helps me tremendously… When I remember [triggering events related to my husband’s death], I practice releasing the anger I still feel” (Participant 4,
Tunal, interview 2018). Another participant told us about how she similarly came to yoga for a therapeutic outlet to process her husband’s passing. She found that the practice helped her deepen her connection to spirituality and to her late husband and realize how we are more than our physicality as humans (Participant 11, Tunal, interview 2018).

Others reported having more control in their lives and that yoga has been useful for cultivating positive behaviours, such as commitment to a practice, or discipline, and, most critically, peaceful relaxation. One woman replied, “well, I have seen changes. I am more relaxed. I used to live very stressed out, and now I have relaxed a lot. When I’m at my job, I relax by thinking or by breathing, by doing what [Dunna] taught us” (Group Participant 2, Tunal, interview 2018). A participant agreed: “personally, I think yoga is about learning to handle personal situations. That I think is the most difficult thing. I am already calmer. I can handle stress, which used to bother me a lot” (Participant 8, Tunal, interview 2018). Another woman noted that yoga “helped me a lot for emotional issues… that’s why I came here… And another thing yoga helped me with was discipline, because now every day in the morning I have the CD and I have the manual and bring the work of Dunna into my home” (Participant 3, Tunal, interview 2018). Another explained that yoga helps with everyday stressors such as taking care of her children, relationships with neighbours and the stressors of living in a big city like Bogotá including navigating public transportation and ensuring personal safety (Group Participant 7, Bosa, interview 2018). She explained the importance of yoga in taking care of both one’s mind and body when navigating stressful aspects of existing in an unequal and complex world:

I always remember what the teacher says here, you learn how to control yourself, like everything can be handled so you don’t get affected in the body. Because what happens is that you get to the point where the body and the mind get affected, and everything. And sometimes either you blow up at other people, you might be hurting yourself, or you might be creating diseases. For example, I got to the point where I was going between tests, the doctor, another doctor, another test, so this program has helped me tremendously… You get to the point where you better calm down for your own good. This this program has been excellent, and I would like it to continue (Group Participant 7, Bosa, interview 2018).

Luis Felipe Torres, the Pedagogical Coordinator at the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano de Boyacá, a youth detention centre in Tunja, Colombia explained how yoga programming
led by Dunna allowed the youth male participants involved to better process their emotions and to become connected to the practice of yoga in a short period of time:

That’s one thing, the other that are disciplined to do the strategy, that is to say to do yoga as such, I think they are very disciplined because they demand even to us, because they become examples for others, so that seemed very good to me because they take their yoga nidra or take out their blanket or whatever and sit for a while to share. It does not take much time and then one see’s that these young people are calmer than others, even more reflective and more sensitive to, say, to live like the present… they are more conscious, and they are the most thoughtful guys out there, and they make better reflection about their personal life, their family life, their life in the process (Torres interview 2017).

The youth in the detention centre often practice on their own, outside of scheduled classes (Torres interview 2017). Luis Felipe explained that the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano engages with restorative practices that often generate a lot of movement of emotions in inmates such as anger, grief, or guilt; before introducing yoga to their routines, these young men had few outlets to adequately cope with, express and move through such difficult emotions (Torres interview). With many young people, most with behavioural issues, cohabitating in small quarters, conflicts arise; yoga has provided an outlet to cope and relax (Torres interview 2017). He explained:

The teens, let’s say, in cohabitation, sometimes they become aggressive, yes? Then when these relaxation works are done, it is another way for them to discharge their anger and not mistreat each other (Torres interview 2017).

María Adelaida López agreed, stating that Dunna’s projects working with youth offenders explicitly aim to break harmful cycles of violence within families and communities, as many of the youth come from backgrounds of family violence, low-income realities, and have high exposure to childhood trauma and other vulnerabilities (López interview 2017a). Torres told me that yoga was a big part of the healing of inmates and a powerful contributor to breaking cycles of violence, giving them the possibility for new avenues in their future (Torres interview 2017). Dunna’s projects at the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano de Boyacá and other centres teach youth to regulate their emotions, manage anger and break the cycle of reactive behaviour by regulating the nervous system and endocrine system through yoga (López interview 2017a).
Several of the young men at the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano, particularly those serving long sentences, are involved in Dunna’s yoga teacher training in hopes that yoga will become a regular and sustainable part of the centre through a peer-to-peer model. In many respects, they are the most troubled of the inmates, largely serving time for homicide or serious sexual assault and rape cases, with sentences varying from 3-8 years (Torres interview 2017). While visiting the Centro Juvenil Amigoniano de Boyacá, the Dunna team and I spoke with an 18-year-old young man who is a tenth-grade student from Guayatá. He was a participant of the yoga teacher training program and said he had no pre-conception of what yoga was before the program started. Moreover, he found that yoga was a useful tool in feeling relaxed, having better sleep, calming anger, and also dealing with the emotions he feels due to his incarceration (Participant 1, Tunja, interview 2017).

Well, if my anger has calmed down too, then if I feel relaxed… Well here inside because it takes me out of the routine of being locked in there *gestures to detention center* and that and there one gets bored and here comes [yoga] and calms down a little (Participant 1, Tunja, interview 2017).

Many of the youth participating in the yoga training have plans to integrate yoga into their lives beyond their time served. Three youth, for example, are studying psychology, respiratory therapy, and physical education, respectively, and hope to integrate yoga into their future work:

part of their life project is practicing yoga and there are some who are having professional careers, let’s say, linked, for example, there is a boy who is studying psychology and he wants, let’s say, to be a psychologist, but to work with yoga… There is another one who is studying respiratory therapy and he practices yoga and practices it. What’s more, his project degree is focused on yoga, and there is another boy who is studying physical education and he takes it as part of the relaxation from his yoga practices. The teens have chosen yoga because it is linked to his project of life, that is to say professional careers that are doing (Torres interview 2017).

Torres believes that yoga as a tool for building peace in the lives of the youth with whom he works mirrors the benefits of yoga for Colombia on a larger scale, especially in addressing the longstanding trauma and broken social ties between differing sides of the conflict (Torres interview 2017).
6.4.2 Physical and physiological benefits

Dunna’s work bridges the mind and body, offering participants an opportunity to connect with their physical body beyond the aesthetic alone, often for the first time (López interview 2017b). Dunna’s participants very frequently report their experienced physical benefits from yoga, such as increased flexibility, more strength, and better sleep (which was a very common response). In some cases, participants had never engaged in any formalized physical activity or intentional body-focused techniques like yoga (Restrepo interview 2017b). Thus, the physical benefits are often the first to be reported. Once participants begin to feel better physically, they have the time and energy to go a little bit deeper and work on the emotional aspects discussed above. In many of Dunna’s programs, a common reported benefit is the ability to reduce or cease taking medications, or a quantifiable reduction in physical symptoms and pain (López interview 2017b). Some of the physical benefits experienced by participants include improved and regular digestion as well as flexibility and muscle elasticity (Quiñones interview 2018).

Several of Dunna’s program participants also have the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or exhibit a range of symptoms of complex trauma. Some of these symptoms had serious physical effects in the body such including nervous system imbalances. María Adelaida López explained:

There is another point that is important is that the yoga works with the parasympathetic system which is like the relaxation part of the nervous system… it’s not just awareness it’s something physical, biological, chemical, so there is a lot of thing going on when you regulate your breathing with your attention… When you don’t have your endocrine system regulated you are going to be depressed or hypervigilant it’s all finding a balance, which I think is magical (López interview 2017a).

Quiñones described that some of Dunna’s participants would flail or even throw a punch upon hearing a loud noise but following their yoga training they can now take a deep breath and feel relaxed and safe in their body and in their surroundings, which she describes as a “very significant change for someone who needs to live in a community again after suffering, after surviving trauma” (Quiñones interview 2018).
Dunna’s work aims to shift their participants’ state of being in their bodies and in the world. The role of the breath to achieve this transformation cannot be understated, Quiñones explains:

physically what the breath does is that it prevents the releasing of all of these hormones. These hormones are only released with very shallow breathing which is associated with your running fast or fighting. Deep breathing completely disarms this process. It stops it right there, so all the hormones cannot be released and the final physical response that you were used to, like throwing a punch or doing something bad, is completely prevented just by you taking a deep breath in the right moment (Quiñones interview 2018).

Several of Dunna’s participants live with chronic pain or other ailments for which yoga was beneficial as a supplementary part of their treatment. For example, three participants in the group interviews I carried out had diagnoses of fibromyalgia (two in Tunal, one in Ibagué). One woman explained, “I have a disease called fibromyalgia, so I’m supposed to do a lot of stretching, a lot of exercise, so yoga has been very helpful for that” (Participant 5, Tunal, interview 2018). Another said:

I personally suffer from fibromyalgia, I get terrible pain, I still get it, but now I can bear it. Before I would go into a crisis and the first thing I would do is fall into depression, and obviously the depression would make the crisis worse. Now, these days, I’ve been in crisis, but I don’t get depressed anymore. I practice my postures; I breathe, and I have my daughter’s support that also helps me with that. So even though this disease has been very painful, it’s been bearable (Group Participant 6, Ibagué, interview 2018).

One of the participants of Dunna’s programs injured her coccyx in a motor-vehicle accident and found that yoga offered very similar exercises and stretches as her health insurance therapies and ended up using yoga as a primary tool in her healing process. She still does yoga at home with her children on a daily basis (Participant 7, Tunal interview 2018). Similarly, a woman living in Santa Marta reported how the skills she gained through yoga have helped her immensely in recovering from a serious car accident (Participant 13, Santa Marta, interview 2017). This same woman also explained to us that her mother was thought

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5 Research has been done that demonstrates a reduction in stress levels through saliva tests (see for example Nobuhiko et al. 2018). Dunna is currently working on implementing this testing into their research with the populations they work with researchers from John Hopkins University.
to be paralyzed in her legs and told that she likely would not walk again. She worked with her mother with yoga techniques, specifically āsana, and focused on the lower body for strengthening and meditation:

That’s why I tell you, with my mother, she was paralyzed, paralyzed, and I with yoga, I was not a teacher yet, but when they gave me the first classes that helped me to do the therapies on the body, in the legs, and also the meditation and that, for example her, the physician said that she was not going to stand up anymore, and happened in 3 months she walked again (Participant 13, Santa Marta, interview 2017).

Another participant in Ibagué reported to us that she saw improvements in her hypertension, or high blood pressure, after participating in the yoga training and found the breathing techniques to be particularly useful (Group Participant 5, Ibagué, interview 2018).

Another of Dunna’s participants found that yoga helped her with her sciatica: “I get this horrible pain, so stretching helps a lot, especially the twists. Personally, I find the twists very useful, they help me to handle… I am very grateful because this arrived at the perfect moment in my life” (Participant 8, Tunal, interview 2018). Another woman reported a decrease in the severe headaches she was getting before joining the yoga course and felt that the skill of mindful breathing was particularly useful for her in intercepting pain episodes (Group Participant 1, Bosa, interview 2018). Another participant told the group about how yoga helps with the symptoms she has experienced since contracting syphilis during a blood transfusion. Her physicians told her she should do yoga both for physical exercise and to stay calm, she explained, “they also told me I should do yoga to calm myself down, because I’m very stressed with my medical tests. I usually get tested throughout the whole month; I’m constantly being medicated. So, this has helped a lot, it’s like I can get out of this subject, I forget about the disease” (Group Participant 3, Bosa, interview 2018). Another uses yoga to cope with her brain tumor diagnosis and the physical effects of the surgeries and loss of control over parts of her body. She explained,

This program has helped me a lot, since my second surgery. It has helped me with my fear. It has also helped me a lot to calm down, to not to think so much about the subject. Like when I have an appointment, and I fear they perhaps will tell me there will be another surgery… I come here to yoga and I feel in good company, I feel calm” (Group Participant 4, Bosa, interview 2018).
Lastly, a participant in Bosa explained, “I got this cephalea or tension headache back in March. So, like in August, the doctors told me I had to practice swimming, yoga, so this program was perfect” (Group Participant 1, Bosa, interview 2018). When asked if it helped her pain she said:

Yes, quite a lot. It all started with these episodes I would get when I was out in the street. I wouldn’t know where I was... But now I’ve learned how to control my breathing, and also other topics related to breathing that the teacher tells us about. Because sometimes we are running around so much that we forget to breathe” (Group Participant 1, Bosa, interview 2018).

6.5 Concluding thoughts

The findings above draw largely from Dunna’s yoga program participants and staff, as well as the organization’s close affiliates or partners. The chapter identified broader observations related to mental health, gender dynamics, and religion. It also looked more closely at the Satyananda yoga tradition and Dunna’s trauma informed approach. Interviewees, drawing from personal experience, explained that yoga is an integrative mind-body technique that can offer unique opportunities to foster peace on individual and collective levels, both of which they found essential for Colombia’s post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. In Chapter 6, interviewees shared personal testimony and stories from their own lived experiences instructing yoga, organizing yoga-based projects, or as participants in such projects. They discussed yoga as an outlet for inner peace—to cultivate resilience, present-moment awareness, understanding of the self, coping with the past, and planting hope for the future. Interviewees also described their experiences with yoga as a helpful outlet self-reflection and emotional regulation, aiding as a mental health resource where formalized and government funded resources may lack (Rondon interview 2018). They discussed yoga as a means to forge social and interpersonal peace—building trust, learning forgiveness, and gaining control in dealing with difficult situations. Interviewees highlighted building community connections and feeling safer in their homes and neighborhoods. They shared about how yoga can be creatively engaged addressing the manifestations of trauma in families, communities and how it can be a helpful resource in transforming conflicts in a peacebuilding setting and as a means of social healing (Lederach and Lederach 2010).
This chapter also discussed how yoga, when used at the collective level, can be an act of and outlet to facilitate coexistence and relationship-building amidst longstanding inequalities, polarized views and complex political divides. Additionally, the chapter explored how yoga offers skills that are useful in navigating community concerns, family relations, and interpersonal conflicts, in addition to coping with the everyday stresses of living in a post-conflict reality, such as a communal landscape of broken trust, instability, and violence. On an individual level, yoga has offered emotional and psychological benefits to participants, such as cultivating the present moment, developing introspective skills, and regulating difficult emotions such as anger or anxiety. Moreover, interviewees reported on the physical benefits, such as nervous system regulation and relief from injury and illness, that they experienced as a result of their participation in yoga-oriented interventions conducted by Dunna.
Chapter 7

7 Yoga as embodied peacework: key themes, connections, possibilities and conclusions

The data gathered from interviews outlined in Chapter 6 facilitates a deeper understanding of what embodied approaches to peacebuilding in post-conflict and transitional contexts can offer and contributes qualitative data to the developing scholarship on non-traditional peacebuilding. By using a qualitative and narrative approach, I have looked at the multifaced sociocultural expressions of yoga, inquiring as to how this unique mind-body practice can offer opportunities in peacebuilding by influencing both individual and collective levels of society.

To briefly summarize, the project’s central questions were explored during a research fellowship with Dunna shortly after the historic signing of the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC. During this time, we looked closely at the programs Dunna facilitates to address deeply rooted, cyclical, and intergenerational violence in Colombia and sought to address critical questions regarding how yoga might complement, contradict, or challenge existing peacebuilding efforts that follow a formal peace process and within conflict/post-conflict settings more generally. We asked how yoga might be different from or complementary to other conventional measures (e.g., peace accords, transitional justice mechanisms) or alternative methods of peacebuilding including dance, visual, and material arts.

These key questions were explored through a series of brief and in-depth interviews conducted across Colombia with various groups and were designed to learn more about experiences and perspectives—both within and surrounding Dunna-led yoga programs that aim to forge trust and facilitate coexistence within numerous communities across Colombia. Interviewees pointed to yoga’s potential as an embodied tool for peacebuilding in facilitating experiences of peace, reconciliation, and coexistence while challenging the constraints of the post-peace accord response in Colombia, the broader global north-centric
aid model, widespread and structural inequalities and the limitations of conventional trauma and peacebuilding interventions. In this sense, Dunna’s work in Colombia serves as a paradigmatic example of the relationships between various layers and aspects of peacebuilding, exploring personal and localized benefits of yoga within the broader landscape of the national peace process. The interview data showcased what makes yoga unique in peace work and echoed the need to consider alternative, counter-hegemonic, socially-justice rooted and transrational approaches that integrate critical discernment with the diverse aspects of the human experience holistically. This integration includes the various layers of conflict including national, community-based, interpersonal, as well as individual aspects of human life.

The findings from the interviews I conducted demonstrate that yoga is a useful tool for transforming conflicts and facilitating experiences of peace on individual, interpersonal and community-levels. The findings have been broken into the following themes: individual peacebuilding (sub themes: emotional and psychological; physical and physiological) and collective peacebuilding (sub themes: social and communal; relational and interpersonal). The experiences shared speak to peacebuilding on its many levels, from individual bodily experiences of peace to national reconciliation and rebuilding in post-conflict realities. This chapter offers a discussion of the key research contributions to the field based on the interview findings, connecting back to previously discussed theoretical work on creative approaches to peace work discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, as well as discusses research limitations and possible directions for future research.

### 7.1 Discussion of key findings

In this dissertation, I have explored how creative methods of peacebuilding that are community-driven, localized, and embodied in approach can challenge the confines of conventional peacebuilding while also offering a unique complement to existing post-conflict initiatives. My research finds that there is a critical need to look closely at the creative, embodied, low-resource, and small-scale contributions by peacemakers in Colombia. It also finds a desperate need to address the non-linear and complicated manifestations of trauma and for peace processes to consider alternative and
complementary avenues for mental health support that address the complex lived reality of decades of violence in post-conflict Colombia and beyond.

My findings focus on one particular method (yoga) in one country case (Colombia). Yet, the particular context of the Colombia conflict and its ongoing peace process can offer broader theoretical insights and may also be useful in informing and understanding current trends and tensions in the study of peace and conflict. Importantly, this suggests that although the insights from this research project may be localized and specific, they might also be instructive in understanding and informing both peace work and peace scholarship. Therefore, I can conclude this project with four specific insights that will be detailed further in the coming pages:

The first is that transrational, relational, and embodied approaches to peace work should be considered in peace work and transitional contexts, especially where state-led and state-funded initiatives are lacking or are limited in their capacity to respond to the intricacies of divergent societal needs and widespread inequality. The Colombian case underlines that peace work cannot keep applying technical and rational methods for addressing or resolving conflicts when the scholarship on peace and peacebuilding recognises that conflicts themselves and how they manifest in society are neither technical nor rational. Peace theorists acknowledge that peace is neither linear nor logical, but the conversation often ends there. My hope is that this research—and this chapter, in particular—can extend that conversation further because the discussion must continue beyond our collective acknowledgement that the nature of conflict and peace is illogical and often incoherent. If conflict, and the peace that may emerge from it, are inherently messy, then the methods and approaches we take to peacebuilding must be equally comfortable with that complexity.

Second, addressing the secondary or even tertiary mental health impacts across populations who may not have been formally engaged in the conflict (e.g., those who were not combatants and also those who may not qualify for formal victim status and benefits) remains severely understudied and underserved by state-led initiatives and processes. The knowledge that scholarship on peace work has acquired about relational, secondary and
intergenerational trauma suggests that societies cannot heal if individual and collective mental health-focused programs are not centred in peacebuilding. For example, this is particularly pertinent in a Canadian context with respect to reconciliation given the intergenerational trauma as a result of the legacy of colonialism and specific state policies such as the residential school system.

Third, there is a link between successfully addressing the embodied manifestations of trauma and peacebuilding. Non-traditional, for example, artistic, creative, and body-focused methods of peacebuilding appear to be especially effective at addressing this correlation between trauma and bodily pain; the Colombian case has been informative in this regard. Given that an embodied approach to peace work can bring needed clarity to the relational and intergenerational effects of trauma, addressing the mind-body connection may have compounding positive effects for peacebuilding. Similarly, not addressing it can have compounding negative effects on families and societies.

Finally, there are limitations to my work regarding the methods used, my own situatedness, the contextual reality in which the research was located, and also in its replicability in other peacebuilding spaces. In other words, while the Colombia case is insightful, the applicability of these insights to other post-conflict spaces are promising but not definitive. This is arguably also a strength and is largely due to the profound care with which Dunna has applied contextualized methods to their programming. As such, the success of their efforts in Colombia suggests that future and further peacebuilding processes need to be highly sensitive to the local context, which requires time, effort and a bottom-up, grassroots-informed process.

7.1.1 Transrational, relational, and embodied approaches to peace work

A broader goal of this research project is to elucidate how the academic field of peace studies can be advanced by asking new and different questions about how we build peace. These questions will develop a more nuanced understanding of how peacebuilding is informed by and informs on-the-ground peace work. Conventional peace theory and praxis
have been increasingly met with criticism and the ways in which we commonly understand and work towards peace globally continue to evolve, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. Theories and practitioners alike have called for new ways of understanding and working towards peace and conflict transformation. One of these paths is a deeper understanding of the psychosocial nature of conflict and the call for a relational understanding of peace work (Lederach 2005; Llewellyn 2012; and Byrne and Senehi 2008). Though the need for large-scale peacebuilding efforts is often dire, such as rebuilding infrastructure, the micro-level, including personal rehabilitation and relational work, is equally critical and has been largely marginalized in both conflict and post-conflict responses (Llewellyn 2012; Lederach 2005). Aspects of peacebuilding, such as being able to relate to community members, rebuild trust, and coexist despite differences may appear minor, but can significantly influence the outcomes of a peace process if success is defined holistically.

Transrational peace philosophy and the applied methodology of elicitive peace work provides a useful theoretical framing for understanding the varied understandings of peace and the multiplicity of experiences that they echo (UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies 2016a). A transrational understanding of peace calls for a holistic expression of the various layers of a conflict, both macro-level and structural as well as individual and interrelational. Furthermore, I argue that in addition to the application of elicitive research methods throughout this research, Dunna’s work itself—where participants dynamically co-create their present-moment experience as well as influence future offerings through cycles of feedback, drawing on relationality and shared experience rather than a prescriptive top-down model—follows the principles of elicitive peace work (Lederach 1995; Koppensteiner 2018). Dunna’s yoga offerings are designed to hold counter-hegemonic possibilities and can speak back to dominant paradigms of building peace that often follow top-down, global north-centric models. In contrast, Dunna’s approach offers a localized and grassroots response, rooted in social justice that may challenge colonial narratives of post-conflict development and peace work. As Lederach outlines (1995), this approach centres transferability and self-sufficiency, and emphasises participants and local knowledge as key resources in the process. These are all critical factors related to project sustainability. Dunna’s yoga spaces arguably facilitate social healing and embodied ways of knowing through multidirectional and community practices which focus on participants’
lived experiences and create spaces in which multiple perceptions can co-exist (Lederach and Lederach 2010). To this effect, the Colombia case and Dunna’s work there facilitate an interesting site of learning about how peace work can be done differently even, and perhaps especially, when considering longstanding, multifactorial, and complex conflicts.

A relational understanding of peace, rather than a strictly rational, linear, or technical one, requires drawing from our relational and interpersonal nature as human beings. An integrative approach to peace work that captures this essence aims to speak to the complexities of human life and of conflict. Yoga’s contributions to the expanded study of peace and conflict are multifold: first, yoga works on the individual body and nervous system, offering dynamic movement and breathwork to participants. Dunna’s yoga program participants report personal benefits such as experiencing less anger and reactivity, the ability to regulate emotions and self-respect, less pain, increased flexibility, and a better connection with themselves. Though the mind and body can be (and often are) medically treated in disconnection from one another, our understanding of the complexity of trauma and its physical effects indicates that more dynamic interventions are needed in peace work. These effects can also include relational challenges, presenting problematically in participants’ family dynamics, relationships, and among neighbours. In this sense, yoga—when practiced in group settings—proves beneficial in forging community connection and building trust among neighbours. This was especially the case in the social housing compounds with which Dunna works. These locations house people with a myriad of political views and perspectives on the peace process, and who may come from different backgrounds—all of which are often cited as a source of tension and conflict among residents.

The group nature of Dunna’s yoga projects make space for affective (i.e., related to feelings, moods and attitudes) transactions between participants and have become important spaces for rebuilding social capital, reciprocity, reclaiming community spaces, and building trust. The collective aspect of these yoga classes allows for addressing the individual effects of the conflict alongside collective ones, such as a collective loss of safety and widespread grief. As such, Dunna works on complex trauma related to war as well as daily trauma, specifically with those who were on the sidelines of formal conflict.
(i.e., those who were not combatants), but for whom violence and division are, or have become, a normalized aspect of everyday life. Together, Dunna’s staff and its participants address structural and mental health barriers in the country while directly targeting the effects of long-term chronic fear and stress. And, by nature of the programmatic focus on mind-body connections, they also focus on the effects on the body from living in daily insecurity—a factor that is largely understated in conventional peace research.

Dunna’s yoga programming is also unique in that they follow the Satyananda tradition, which focuses on nervous system regulation and relaxation. Therefore, Dunna’s yoga practices incorporate a variety of relaxation-focused breathing techniques as well as the guided meditation (yoga nīḍra), which Dunna curates to the needs of a particular population. Offerings have been designed to complement mental health care or to fill any gaps in Colombia, where the need for services is vast. Dunna’s yoga programming has also been successful, beyond its therapeutic nature, due to its accessibility to participants. Classes and programs are offered for free, and include access to materials such as yoga mats, blankets, and instructional CDs for home use. Participant input and feedback are also routinely recorded and incorporated into future programming. Because accessibility is an essential component of Dunna’s philosophy, its yoga programs are adapted to participants’ local culture, language and specific dialects, physical abilities, and trauma responses. In many of the areas of Colombia in which Dunna works, teacher trainings are underway to offer economic and career opportunities to participants as well as provide a more sustainable, localized, and community-embedded response to post-conflict peacebuilding. Their creative, ground-up solutions to challenging and complex peacebuilding issues demonstrate a profound capacity for grassroots resilience in the Colombian case. These factors may challenge many of the limitations that modern yoga purports (see Chapter 3), such as high commercialization, over-focus on the physical body, as well as barriers to access based on course content, language, and fees. Dunna’s work stands in contrast to and problematizes the top-down development model and imported peace models derived primarily from global north spaces. They do so in part by engaging in a yoga tradition faithful to its Indian roots, rather than what we might know of as yoga in the global north context, and by providing Colombian-led solutions to peace that contain a deep knowledge of and relationship to local spaces and peoples. As such, Dunna’s work holds space for
resistance to the status quo and reclaims the peacebuilding process for Colombians from an often outsourced, colonially rooted way of conducting peace work.

Chapter 3 also discussed the risk that modern yoga practices pose by instrumentalizing yoga as a means to outsource health and trauma care to the individual, thus negating state responsibility. Yoga led by Dunna arguably presents a concerted counter-hegemonic response to neoliberalist tendencies by pushing for the institutionalization of yoga as a state-sanctioned post-conflict response in some cases and highlighting issues of social injustice while also offering complementary programming alongside other services in others. In cases where the state response (especially to access to psychologists and psychiatrists) has been slow, delayed, or lacking, Dunna’s projects, which are designed in conjunction with relevant health professionals, offer a possible solution for those dealing with complex trauma as they navigate access to other supports. That Dunna’s programming is in such demand also speaks to the issue of volume of need in Colombia, where even those who are formally recognized and registered as victims of the conflict have struggled to access care; those unregistered (but still deeply affected by the conflict) have fallen through institutional cracks. Their rigorous research endeavours highlight this and inform state policies related to mental health and social inequality, in addition to providing an immediate on-the-ground need. Yoga, in this sense, can offer tangible tools for those waiting to receive other assistance and provide unique offerings through group classes as well as skills that can be practiced at home. Where talk-therapy approaches to healing may be limiting in terms of mind-body solutions or longer-term efficacy, yoga-based approaches may be complementary.

7.1.2 Mental health, war, and the impacts of complex, intergenerational, and structural violence(s)

In the Colombian case, immediately following the peace process ratification, government policies and protocols emphasized financial compensation to victims and demobilized persons as part of the reparation and reintegration efforts. The focus for the government was on the development of what López described as the country’s “hard abilities”—its physical infrastructure such as housing and transportation, both of which were important
issues for a geographically vast and disconnected country. The country’s “soft abilities”—its human capital and the role of mental health and well-being in the reconstruction of the social fabric and communal peace—were not priorities (López interview 2017b). Dunna aims to address this gap and offers a cost-effective alternative to existing mental health services which are both costly and inaccessible (López interview 2018). Their approach recognises that mental health struggles are deeply connected to previous and current experiences of trauma, in addition to precarious social and political realities such as the loss of employment or poverty. The yoga interventions led in collaboration with the government and Dunna have aided in reducing irritability and aggression and improving participants’ post-traumatic and psychological symptoms—all of which create ripple effects on both interpersonal and community levels (Rondón interview 2018).

The findings of this research highlight the importance of Dunna’s programming being group-based and focuses on longer-term interventions when considering mental health. Often, the post-conflict mental health interventions in Colombia are individualized and lack a collective or community focus (Rondón interview 2018). Due to the communal nature of Colombian society, and of Latin American culture more broadly, programming that emphasises the country’s cultural relationality can be more successful (Rondón interview 2018). Such programs work to re-establish broken societal bonds and facilitate trust, which Rondón stresses is a critical element of the post-conflict stage: “healing and recovery is something that does not come from a professional but also by the personal and community relationships which are rebuilt” (Rondón interview 2018).

Interviewees also reported that mental health concerns in Colombia are connected to direct exposure to and involvement in violence and because of broader systemic issues related to the country’s social and political landscape (López interview 2017b). The broader culture of violent conflict impacts the mental health of society as a whole, beyond individual-level interventions; as such, a total reconceptualization of what mental health means in the context of historical, cultural, and social realities (Rondón interview 2018). For example, beliefs, relationships, conflict resolution skills, and how individuals perceive one another are all informed by the longstanding conflict(s) in Colombia. Violence in this case extends beyond individualized indicators of aggressive tendencies and is influenced by broader
social dynamics such as racial inequality, class divides, a lack of trust in authorities like the government or police, and collective perceptions of impunity and justice (Rondón interview 2018). These findings map on to existing research which finds that rates of mental health challenges are particularly high among Colombia’s internally displaced peoples, which the United Nations Human Rights Council estimates to be as many as 7.6 million people and thus making them the largest internally displaced population in the world (Tamayo-Agudelo and Bell 2019; United Nations Human Rights Council 2020; and Chaskel, Gaviria, Espinel, Taborda, Vanegas, and Shultz 2015, 96).

Colombia’s need for concerted focus on social issues, particularly mental health, as a critical component of peacebuilding, emerged as a key theme in the interviews. As data continues to be assessed from various corners of the globe, such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, Rwanda, Cambodia, and the Balkans, the Colombia case appears to be less of an outlier on this front, and instead points to the immense impact of armed conflict on the mental health of combatants and civilians (Bell, Méndez, Martínez, Palma, and Bosch 2012, 2). For example, even in places like Bogotá, a city that is geographically removed from the heart of the Colombia conflict, the pervasiveness of mental health issues has remained high: a 2016 study revealed that more than 3 million people in Bogotá, 35% of the city’s population, live with depression or anxiety (Castro interview 2017). The country’s 2016 National Mental Health Survey also indicated that anxiety, mood disorders, and suicide were higher in areas where the conflict is most intense and in regions where violence has been the most constant (Tamayo-Agudelo and Bell 2019). Bell et al.’s (2012) findings from their study, for which they partnered with Doctors Without Borders, also draw a correlation between the conflict and the widespread mental health concerns in the country: the most commonly reported symptoms among research participants included low mood, excessive worry and hopelessness, fear, anxiety, sleep disorders, generalized somatic body pain, aggression, guilt, and emotional numbing (Bell, Fernanda, Martínez, Pablo Palma, and Bosch 2012, 1). Interestingly, based on the data acquired from more than 6,000 participants in the Nariño, Cauca, Putumayo, and Caquetá regions of Colombia, they found a need to focus on the systemic impacts of armed conflict on societies at large and not solely on those with direct exposure to it (Bell et al. 2012, 1).
Interviewees attest to this point. They explained that affective programming can be met with resistance in Colombia and that must be considered (Rondón interview 2018; Zuleta interview 2017; Quiñones interview 2018; López interview 2017b). Yoga, therefore, may attract participants because it is a physical exercise, or may present an interesting option worth exploring, exactly because it is not an explicit outlet for therapy or affective relational work, although this is a secondary benefit for participants (Rondón interview 2018). Interviewees also note that conventional approaches to quotidian mental health challenges such as talk-therapy alone may be less appropriate in contexts of mass and long-term violence that is (now) deeply rooted into family and social structures and well as socially-constructed norms of masculinity (Rondón interview 2018; Quiñones interview 2018; López interview 2018). The widespread patterns of violence and associated machismo culture plays out in societies and within families across Colombia: in Bogotá alone, more than 12,500 cases of intimate partner violence were registered in 2018 (Pasquali 2020). Though not a direct result of the armed conflict, these realities interconnect; one in five women nationwide living with a partner reported physical abuse and one in ten women reported sexual abuse (Chaskel et al. 2015, 96). Intrafamilial violence was also identified as a driving force for individuals to leave to find a better life by joining guerilla and paramilitary groups and was also cited as a barrier to living in daily peace by residents of Cuidad Equidad in Santa Marta whom I interviewed (López interview 2017b; Liévano-Karim 2019, 8). These layers must be addressed and doing so is integral to Dunna’s holistic approach and their desire to dig beyond the formalities of conflict to the intergenerational patterns and dynamics related to complex trauma and deep-rooted violence(s) (López interview 2018). To this extent, yoga as an intervention that addresses violence head-on may improve the collective well-being by reducing recidivism and offering a new path for Colombia’s future (Rondón interview 2018).

With this in mind, yoga performed within a hyper-masculine or machismo culture is interesting, given the evolving nature of yoga globally (where it has shifted from a largely male activity with roots in India to a highly feminised activity in the global north). In much of the world, and particularly in the global north, yoga is widely equated with femininity and is largely practiced by women—83% of the 20 million practitioners in the US are women (Niiler 2013). Yet, in rural and remote corners of Colombia where the communities
most affected by violence are found, the preconceptions of yoga as a gendered practice do not always exist. Often, before the practice is introduced into the community through Dunna’s programming, individuals can be unaware of what yoga is or what it means socially or culturally in other parts of the world. The Colombian case therefore contrasts with several existing case studies of yoga used in hyper-masculine contexts—such as prison populations—in North America, where male participants have been reluctant to participate (see, for example, Norman 2015, 78).

Colombia remains a country very much in transition—not only to formal democratic ideas of peace, but also in adopting mental health and well-being policies within the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts that follow the adoption of the peace accord with the FARC (López interview 2018). The focus on mental health has been integral to Dunna’s mission: when the organization was created in 2012, Colombia had no national mental health policy and efforts to understand what kinds of interventions were available revealed that there were few psychologists and psychiatrists in the country and that available care was limited to four major cities (López interview 2018; Rondón interview 2018). In other words, care, which was concentrated in urban areas, was often not reaching those most affected by the then-ongoing conflict, especially those in rural and isolated regions (see also Chaskel et al. 2015, 95).

López and her team at Dunna also observed that there were simply not enough care providers to treat the degree of trauma that Colombia society had experienced, including the psychosocial effects of a half-century of violence and war (López interview 2018). In most cases, government-provided services for the formally-recognized victims of the conflict only provided a maximum of five one-on-one sessions with a mental health care provider; in contrast, Dunna often offers as many as 28 interventions per victim (Rondón interview 2018). These government-provided five one-on-one sessions are part of the government’s response to the Victims’ Law, passed in 2011, which sought to offer mental health, psychosocial, medical, legal, public health, and economic programming for those deemed “victims of armed conflict” (Chaskel et al. 2015, 96). However, state-offered mental health services related to the war have been limited to “victim” and “perpetrator” categories and exclude the general population who, while not actively involved in the
conflict, nevertheless lived the conflict and equally continue to experience the physical, mental, and emotional consequences of this lived experience. As of 2018, there were no avenues for the general population to seek state-funded mental health care; those who do not clearly fit into the victim-perpetrator binary risk falling through the cracks of care (Rondón interview 2018).

7.1.3 Addressing complex trauma and the mind-body connection in peace work

Interviewees also pointed over and over to the relationship between the mind and body. The focus on the mind-body connection underlines a central thread of my project: this deeply complex and often misunderstood concept is pertinent to understanding and expanding what we know about trauma, recovery, and resilience in both peace studies literature and on-the-ground post-conflict work. Dunna participants have, through yoga, begun to recover, heal, find meaning, and return to activities they previously thought were unachievable (López interview 2017b). These results echo the long-documented effects of yoga on prehistoric communities in India (see, for example, the *Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali*, which dates to 450 CE). Modern science, however, is only beginning to understand the profound physiological benefits derived from the practice, such as the important ability to rewire one’s nervous system (Malhotra and Kumar 2001; Quiñones interview 2018). Emerging research on Sahaja Yoga meditation, for example, indicates that the practice increases grey matter in the brain, measured via MRI scans, which is associated with sustained attention, self-control, interoception, and emotional regulation (Hernández, Suero, Barros, González, Mora, andRubia 2016, 2; Hernández, Barros-Loscertales, Xiao, González-Mora, and Rubia 2018, 395). Similar studies that demonstrate the effects of meditation on the brain, again using MRI scanning, include research on variations of meditation such as Zen, Tibetan Buddhist, mindfulness-based, Soham, loving kindness and brainwave vibration meditation, as well as a study focusing on six types of medication: Chenrezi, Kriya, Shamatha, Vajrayana, Vipassana and Zazen (Hernández et al. 2016, 2).

Researchers have also discovered a strong correlation between exposure to childhood trauma, measured through childhood adversity and associated adverse childhood
experiences, or ACE, scores, and a vulnerability to developing chronic pain later in life (see, for example, You and Meagher 2016; Lane, Anderson and Smith 2018; and You, Albu, Lisenbardt, and Meagher 2019). These ACE scores examine childhood exposure to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; physical and emotional neglect; exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, or incarceration in the household; and parental separation or divorce. They provide a partial guide to understanding the effects of childhood adversity on later life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020) and suggest there may be a greater risk of developing chronic pain. There are limitations to this methodology: these scores do not account for stressors outside the family such as structural racism, rural isolation, or lack of access to services; or for protective factors such as a coach or mentor figure outside the family (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University n.d.), but this type of research indicates a continued need for research on the subject, especially given the pervasiveness of exposures to adverse life situation in conflict situations.

Similarly, researchers have also identified correlations between PTSD and chronic pain among refugee populations (Rometsch-Ogioun El Sount, Windthorst, Denkinger, Ziser, Nikendei, Kindermann, Ringwald, Renner, Zipfel, and Junne 2019). Though the research may be nascent and scarce in this particular field, the studies thus far conducted on the topic, according to Rometsch-Oguin El Sount et al., conclude that increased pain symptoms are most highly associated with aging research subjects, women, as well as those with general living difficulties (e.g., frequent displacement or poverty) and PTSD symptoms (Rometsch-Ogioun El Sount et al. 2019, 84). Pain prevalence in refugee populations can be as high as 83%, with headache pain alone ranging from 39 to 93% in different populations around the world (Rometsch-Ogioun El Sount et al. 2019, 83), while a Danish study estimated that 68% of asylum seekers meet the International Classification of Disease’s (ICD-10) criteria for PTSD (Stårup Madson, Carlsson, Nordbrandt, and Jensen 2016, 243).

Actual causation between physical, especially chronic, pain experienced by Dunna’s participants and their lived reality in post-conflict Colombia is impossible to draw given the nature and scope of this project. However, a large number of participants I interviewed
self-reported decreased levels of pain or symptoms of anxiety and depression related to their pain or other health concerns as a result of Dunna’s programming. For some of these interviewees, yoga has offered an outlet for distraction, self-soothing, and grounding. Importantly, these anecdotal accounts map onto existing literature both on the increased prevalence of chronic pain and stress conditions in post-conflict realities around the world, and in Colombia specifically, as well as the literature pointing to the close relationship between exposure to trauma or PTSD and chronic pain. For example, a 2014 survey conducted by the Colombia Association for the Study of Pain found that chronic pain affects 47% of Colombians, a high proportion when located within the global range of 15-50% (Griego, Gómez, Gomezese, Cadavid, Yepes, Mayungo, Acosta-Reyes, Meléndez, López, Chaparro, Cifuentes, and Fernand 2016, 335).

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in the connection between chronic pain and psychological conditions such as PTSD, as research and clinical practice continue to note high rates of comorbidity and interaction between these conditions (see, for example, Kind and Otis 2019; Campbell, Kenardy, Andersen, Mcgregor, Maujean, and Sterling 2015; Tesarz, Gerhardt, Leisner, Janke, Treede, and Eich 2015; Pegram, Lumley, Jasinski, and Burns 2017; Linton, Flink, and Vlaeyen 2018; and Palacio, Krikorian, Saldarriaga, and Vargas 2012). Tesarz et al. (2015) explain that an increase in pain is associated with other trauma exposures that may not be classified as a DSMV definition of PTSD or have all of the common PTSD characteristics. As such, there may be a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between biological, psychological, and social factors that interact and contribute to the experience of pain (Kind and Otis 2019). Kind and Otis explain that pain and emotional conditions, such as PTSD, share common neurological pathways and can reinforce one another (i.e., pain can add to feelings of anxiety or depression and vice-versa) (2019, 1). Moreover, “mechanisms such as fear, avoidance and catastrophizing may maintain both conditions” (Kind and Otis 2019, 7). Although much of the existing scholarship on the correlation between trauma exposure and pain primarily examines male combat veterans from the global north (see, for example, Aase, Babione, Proescher, Greenstein, Digangi, Schroth, Kennedy, Feeley, Tan, Cosio, and Phan 2018; Herbert, Malaktaris, Lyons, and Norman 2020; Irwin, Konnert, Wong, and O’Neill 2014; Hehemann, Van Kuiken, Etingen, Weaver, and Branch 2017; Bartoszek, Hannan, Kamm,
Pamp, and Maieritsch 2017; Plagge, Lu, Lovejoy, Karl, and Dobscha 2013; Gros, Szafranski, Brady, and Back 2015; Lang, Veazey-Morris and Andrasik 2014; and Cook, Meyer, Evans, Vowles, Klocék, Kimbrel, Gulliver, and Morissette 2015), chronic pain is also associated with low socioeconomic indicators such as poverty, low educational attainment, and access to adequate healthcare (see, for example, a U.S.-based example from Dahlhamer, Lucas, Zelaya, Nahin, Mackey, DeBar, Kerns, Von Korff, Porter, and Helmick 2018). This is an important area of focus, and an area for future research.

Addressing the ways that experiences of trauma and violence alter brain composition and the body’s nervous system is central to Dunna’s work in Colombia. Several of Dunna’s program participants have also been clinically diagnosed with PTSD or exhibit a range of symptoms of complex trauma (e.g., anxiety, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, reactivity). The organization’s 2015 study, “Efficacy of a Satyanada Yoga Intervention for Reintegrating Adults Diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” speaks to the widespread nature of PTSD in Colombia, especially among ex-combatants from demobilising armed groups, which they estimated at 37.5% (Quiñones et al. 2015). Among the primary objectives of Dunna’s yoga programming are opening the mind to new ways of thinking and being in the world; in turn, participants are supported in retraining their central nervous system (Quiñones interview 2018). Dunna’s work, in this sense, treats the symptoms as impacts of trauma on the body and mind, rather than an individualized, medicalized understanding of the mind as “disordered.” The body’s fight or flight response includes the release of certain hormones and internal chemicals that can change the body’s physiology, especially when this becomes a sustained or chronic state of being for the body.¹ (Quiñones interview 2018). To address this response, Dunna incorporates breathing exercises to regulate the nervous system through slow, repetitive, and intentional inhales

¹ Their approach is supported by the existing literature on the neurobiology of trauma, which explains the profound effect that trauma has (or can have) on the brain, including reduced functioning of the prefrontal cortex, a critical part of the brain involved in decision-making and planning, emotional responses, and mood regulation (Arnsten, Raskind, Taylor, and Connor et al. 2015, 89). For example, dissociation, or autopilot mode, is a common symptom for those who have experienced trauma (University of Northern Colorado n.d.). In this case, the prefrontal cortex is bypassed, leaving the body to rely upon preconditioned habitual responses as a survival mechanism, rather than its ability to think critically or rationally (University of Northern Colorado n.d.).
and exhales to “prevent the release of all these hormones. These hormones are released with very shallow, quick breathing which happens with running fast or fighting. Deep breathing completely disarms this process and resets the nervous system” (Quiñones interview 2018). This process of resetting the nervous system, according to Dunna, ca- re-engage critical brain functions that are otherwise impeded when the brain prepares for threats, such as the ability to feel empathy—critical to building and experiencing peace (Quiñones interview 2018).

In sum, further study and a deeper understanding of the role of the mind-body connection in post-conflict might be a useful consideration in peace work. When I began my interviews, this connection was not clear to me, even considering my prior knowledge and research of yoga. I was particularly surprised by the number of Dunna’s participants who spoke to me about physical pain and other health ailments, which Dunna’s staff and yoga instructors also echoed. These results urged me to dive deeper into the secondary research touched on throughout this section. Given the pervasiveness of exposure to violence and the effects of long-term stress on the body and mind, a better appreciation of the different manifestations of trauma would expand on-the-ground peace work and also how we theorize peace.

7.2 Limitations and possibilities for future research

One of my project’s strengths is the wide net it casts. A broad scope has allowed me to incorporate many voices and perspectives from different regions and backgrounds across Colombia. Such a diverse snapshot permits me to consider multiple ideas, themes, and theoretical perspectives in concurrence, providing the opportunity to see interconnections across broader themes. That wide net, though, also poses limitations in terms of the depth of the analysis provided and the ability to draw concrete conclusions from the data. There is a fundamental tension in this kind of work between breadth and depth. This is the reality of peace work: even if all the interviewees had been from one of Dunna’s project—say, their programming with incarcerated youth—the results of my discussions in Colombia would still not reveal a complete narrative, as understandings and experiences of peace continue to be in constant flux.
My data also relies on qualitative, descriptive accounts, in addition to secondary academic research and media sources, which poses difficulties in comparing and contrasting findings or drawing clear trends. Yet, a strength of this approach is the way it centres the narratives and voices that might otherwise be lost in positivist approaches to research such as quantitative research. A storytelling approach seeks to avoid stereotypical representations or blanket statements about the Colombian case or Colombians’ experiences and instead confers the complexity of the human condition and of the research process itself through the mosaic that it creates. The interviews themselves were dynamic, following a snowball approach to finding interviews and a semi-structured, malleable format in conducting them—one that changes based on factors such as interview location, interpersonal dynamics, and time constraints. My project also demonstrates the complexities of community-based and collaborative research. It explores what it means to put feminist methodological principles into praxis and to co-construct knowledge and produce research that is more vulnerable, embedded, and relational. As such, the project carries the limitations of human dynamics and people-centred research. Moreover, it reflects realities such as time and financial constraints, personal delays and interruptions, language and cultural barriers, the unintended consequences of good intentions, and the inherent power dynamics of research across international and community boundaries.

Another limitation is the transferability of such projects to other peacebuilding spaces. Considering the replicability of Dunna’s projects in other communities and contexts requires creativity related to funding and resource, a deep understanding of the conflict at hand, the conflicting parties and the specific challenges of participants. Future projects would require culturally appropriate measures and be able to address gaps in the broader peacebuilding effort. Dunna’s yoga projects were not a quick fix or created on a whim but were rather rigorously studied before implementation. This includes a deep understanding of the methods, in this case yoga. Dunna’s offerings were organized and well-designed yet also left room to be influenced and shaped by all who participated. A dynamic, elicitive approach rooted in the understanding of how conflicts and situations change and the skills and resources to facilitate this, are recommended. Furthermore, context-specific approaches to peace generally require an open disposition to the notion of holding multiple experiences and realities concurrently. In formal truth and reconciliation processes, this
relies heavily on a genuine truth-searching and -seeking aspect, which not every state-led initiative may include. The Colombian context is unique in many respects due to the longstanding and culturally embedded nature of the conflict and the country’s peace process which has aimed to have a victim-centered approach to facilitate coexistence and the reintegration of former combatants.

Moreover, this research offers, on the one hand, perspectives from a small snapshot in time and, on the other, a wide scope in terms of topics and interviewees. My time in Colombia closely followed the signing of the 2016 peace accord and the findings presented here are situated within this context and fragment in history. A longitudinal or follow-up study could offer interesting and new perspectives. Similarly, a narrower focus for the interviews, knowing now the key themes of discussion, could offer more detailed insights on topics such as the intersections of yoga and masculinity in the Colombian context. Future research, for example, on Dunna’s programming with incarcerated youths or victims of sexual violence could similarly be considered. Many interviewees reported having been displaced by the conflict; as such, a closer look at this topic and how yoga (or creative peace-oriented programming in general) could assist in re-finding community or developing a personal sense of grounding could also be interesting, as could a more detailed focus on mental health indicators that examine the mind-body connection and the prevalence of chronic pain in Colombia. Likewise, a more detailed analysis of the barriers, challenges, and benefits to institutionalising yoga in a post-peace accord framework, as Dunna has done with the Government of Colombia, would be fruitful, as would future research surrounding the transferability of Dunna’s model to other conflict-affected regions. Alternatively, future research could contrast yoga as a tool in contexts without formal peace accords.

Finally, this project ends in another fragment of time as the world battles the COVID-19 virus—a situation that poses many challenges to everyday life in Canada, Colombia, and across the globe. The pandemic has brought forth new challenges and considerations in both the peacebuilding sector and yoga spaces. This arguably adds another layer of complexity to post-conflict and rehabilitative work and additional barriers for societies and individuals seeking connection and rebuilding of social ties. Current realities have left
many globally living in insecurity, chronic stress and isolated from social and interpersonal connection. Possible research to explore these complexities, particularly the challenges in the peace sector, is also of interest.

7.3 Concluding thoughts

I want to conclude my research project with this summary thought: conflict is a common part of the human condition, and our approaches to addressing conflict should be as dynamic as the lived realities of conflict parties. A transrational approach work sees peace as a multifaceted social construct, in constant flux, shaped by all interactions and parties involved. In this understanding, the small, local, contextual, personal, and interpersonal are, as they were, sites of conflict, sites of peacebuilding and healing for communities impacted by violence. By transgressing the rational, the technical, and the linear— a transrational understanding of peace can hold space for different experiences, fragments of time, multiple dialogues of memory, and, as a result, opportunities for more nuanced approaches to peacebuilding. This understanding is fundamental to how we approach peace in a world where conflict and the resolutions of these conflicts seems decreasingly straightforward. Peacebuilding in situations of heightened contextual complexity is not a static process or end goal, but rather a transformative and embodied process.

Yoga as a tool for peacebuilding lends nicely to the dynamism required in our transformative approaches to peace work. On an individual level, yoga works to address the mind-body connection and the complexities of trauma, including nervous system dysregulation, dissociation, and reactivity. On a collective level, yoga creates the potential for affective transactions and the space to connect, which are instrumental to build new connections and repair broken trust. It can also be a tool to rebuild social capital, reclaim space, and address collective grief and trauma. Integrative of the full human experience, Dunna’s work with yoga demonstrates that the practice is an important site of both conflict transformation and a multi-dimensional and embodied method for peace in post-conflict situations. Dunna’s programming further demonstrates yoga’s soft-power potential as a culturally-embedded, cost-effective, low-resource, social-justice informed and grassroots-led method for peacebuilding. The organization’s efforts also showcase the urgent need to
consider the quotidian element (or everydayness) of conflict and post-conflict life, including longstanding and inter-generational violence and the complex effects of living in daily insecurity and chronic stress. Interviewees from this project have highlighted the profound effects that complex and long-term exposures to trauma can have on the body and mind, which can also play out in relational and community dynamics as well.

While many who study peace and engage in applied peace work would agree that peace is non-linear and complex nature, little is spoken about how peace is non-linear (Lederach 2013, 83). Yoga as a practice offers a unique conceptual framework when considering living in a state of persistent conflict and experiencing formal and informal transitions to peace. For example, what does it mean to find refuge in the present moment, facilitated by yoga, when the future bears uncertainty and the past, painful moments? An understanding of yoga as a tool for peace speaks to the paradox of peacebuilding in that it is often intellectualized and described in liner and technical ways, void of more nuanced understandings of the sporadic and complex nature of conflict. Though the stories shared throughout this work are snapshots from a fragmented and fleeting moment in time, they exemplify the transformative capacities of non-conventional avenues to and experiences of peace. By being disruptive and counter-hegemonic, yoga as an embodied approaches to peacebuilding offers great potential to address both immediate needs of those affected by longstanding violence and structural barriers of a system in transition to peace.
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Appendix A: Letter of informed consent and information
(English)

Letter of Informed Consent and Information

Study: Elicitive approaches to post-conflict community peacebuilding and reconciliation

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Researcher: Mayme Lefurgey, Ph.D. Candidate
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Partner Organization: Corporación Dunna Alternativas creativas para la paz
Bogotá, Colombia
Contact: Natalia Quiñones, Co-Fundadora
You are invited to participate in a research study that examines how communities engage in various peacebuilding processes to transform their post-conflict realities after experiencing individual and collective traumas. This project looks at how alternative forms of peacebuilding are engaged (for example, methods such as dance, yoga, art and theatre) in the pursuit of community reconciliation, the reparation of social fabrics, healing and conflict transformation. The primary case study of this project focuses on the ongoing peace process in Colombia and associated community-driven projects for peace happening across the country. This qualitative research project aims to further understand what a holistic approach to peacebuilding can look like which focuses not only on structural and formalized reparations and rebuilding but also on interpersonal and individual layers of a conflict. This study hopes to expand understandings of peacebuilding by centralizing locally-driven initiatives that draw on local knowledge and relationality between individuals, bridging the macro and micro level components of peace, offering a more holistic understanding.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision on participating in this research. You are being invited to participate due to your expertise, knowledge and/or personal experience with peacebuilding in Colombia. You are being asked to take part because a) you are a participant of a peacebuilding project in Colombia, b) an organizer or employee of a peacebuilding project in Colombia, c) a relevant stakeholder such as a government official, funder or academic related to such projects in Colombia or elsewhere.

After conflict, societies find ways to heal, find peace, and come together again as a unified society. This can be accomplished using formal mechanisms, including trials and truth commissions. This can also happen through alternative and non-conventional methods such as participation in yoga, art, theatre and dance projects that bring people together again and help them reconcile their differences. These types of methods are increasingly being consulted and organized within prominent conflicts around the world, making it a fresh and innovative research area with potential to influence peace research and policy.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview Mayme Lefurgey, a Ph.D. Candidate from Western University in Canada. The interview will last approximately thirty minutes to a maximum of one hour.
Risks and
Discomforts

There are no known risks to your participation in this study. Should
any of the questions be emotionally triggering, please notify the
researcher. The interview can be terminated at any stage and
questions can be skipped. If you feel you require more debriefing
and/or counselling resources please notify the researcher.

Benefits

Through this research, the role of non-conventional methods of
reconciliation and peacebuilding will become clearer. This will be
of benefit within the academic community in broadening the
theoretical and practical understanding of the factors that contribute
to peace and reconciliation in post-conflict settings. It is hoped that
this will have effects throughout the scholarly community that
continues to acknowledge the role of alternative means of
peacebuilding that communities are choosing for themselves. To the
policy community, this research provides a rationale to influence the
funding of programs that promote alternative forms of
reconciliation and peace. To the NGO community, this research
provides a framework within which to target programming for
communities that are trying to deal with a complicated past. It is
expected that NGOs will adjust their programmatic goals and tools
to align with the understanding provided by the project in Colombia
but also in other areas of the world where yoga programs to deal
with conflict are growing rapidly. On a personal level, as a
participant you may benefit from participation in this study. Your
participation offers you an outlet to express your story and also to
inform critical research, which is a form of healing.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research
study.

Confidentiality

Please be assured that your confidentiality will be protected. Should
you agree to be interviewed, the researcher will collect your name
and contact details, which will be associated with a unique ID
number. Your name and the interview data will not be collected
together and will never be stored together, in order to ensure
confidentiality. You will not otherwise be identified, unless you
specifically identify during the interview process that you would
like to be quoted directly. If the results of the study are published,
your name will not be used and no information that discloses your
identity will be released or published without your specific consent
to the disclosure. Recordings of this interview and any written
material that follows from it will be kept in a locked cabinet at all
times. When in transit, it will be with researcher at all times. Only
she will have access to it and will strive to ensure the confidentiality
of your research-related records. Furthermore, representatives of
The University of Western Ontario Non- Medical Research Ethics

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Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. Confidentiality of your research-related records will be upheld in this event.

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<tr>
<th>Contact Person</th>
<th>If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mayme Lefurgey at <a href="mailto:mlefurge@uwo.ca">mlefurge@uwo.ca</a> or +75 3508822563 (Bogotá, Colombia) or +1 5198703782 (Ontario, Canada).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Waiver of Rights</td>
<td>You do not waive legal rights by agreeing to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>If you would like to receive a copy of the overall results of this study, please put your name and address on a blank piece of paper and give it to Ms. Mayme Lefurgey. She will deliver the results once the study has been completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>You must indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by participating in an interview with Mayme Lefurgey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Participation</td>
<td>Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request that your data not be used in the study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research project is funded and supported by:

![Funding logos]

**Participant Contact Information:**

Name:

Profession:

Contact details:

Consent to have name published in findings:
Appendix B: Letter of informed consent and information (Spanish)

Carla de consentimiento informado

Estudio: Enfoques elicivivos para la construcción comunitaria de paz y reconciliación en el post-conflicto

Investigador Principal: Dr. Joanna R. Quinn, Profesor Asociado
Departamento de Ciencia Política
Universidad de Western Ontario
Londres, Ontario, Canadá

Investigador: Mayme Lefurgey, Candidata a Doctora
Departamento de Estudios de Género e Investigación sobre Feminismo
Programa Colaborativo en Justicia Transicional y Reconstrucción en Post-Conflictos
Universidad de Western Ontario
Londres, Ontario, Canadá

Organización aliada: Corporación Dunna Alternativas Creativas Para la Paz
Bogotá, Colombia
| Propósito de la investigación | Usted está invitado a participar en un estudio de investigación que examina cómo las comunidades se involucran en diversos procesos de construcción de paz para transformar las realidades posteriores al conflicto tras haber experimentado traumas individuales y colectivos. Este proyecto analiza cómo las diferentes formas de construcción de paz se emplean (por ejemplo, métodos como la danza, el yoga, el arte y el teatro) en la búsqueda de la reconciliación comunitaria, la reparación de tejidos sociales, la sanación y la transformación de conflictos. El estudio de caso de este proyecto se centra, principalmente, en el Proceso de Paz que se ha venido dando en Colombia y en los proyectos de paz que se están llevando a cabo en todo el país.
Este es un proyecto de investigación cualitativa que busca comprender cómo puede ser un enfoque amplio de la construcción de paz que se centre, no solo en las reparaciones y reconstrucciones estructurales y formales, sino también en los niveles interpersonales e individuales del conflicto. Este estudio espera ampliar la comprensión de la construcción de paz centrándose en las iniciativas impulsadas localmente basadas en el conocimiento local y en la relación entre las personas, uniendo los componentes macro y micro de la paz y ofreciendo así una comprensión más amplia del tema. |
<p>| Invitación a participar en la investigación | El objetivo de esta carta es brindarle a usted la información que necesita para tomar una decisión informada sobre su participación en esta investigación. Usted está invitado a participar de esta debido a su experiencia y/o conocimiento sobre la construcción de paz en Colombia. Se le está invitando a participar porque a) usted es participante de un proyecto de construcción de paz en Colombia, b) usted es un organizador o empleado de un proyecto de construcción de paz en Colombia, c) usted es actor un relevante para estos procesos de construcción de paz (como un funcionario gubernamental, financiero o académico relacionado con tales proyectos en Colombia o en otros lugares). |
| Descripción de la investigación | Después del conflicto, las sociedades encuentran formas de sanar, encontrar paz y volver a unirse como una sociedad unificada. Esto se puede lograr utilizando mecanismos formales como juicios y comisiones de la verdad, así como también puede suceder a través de métodos alternativos y no convencionales como la participación en proyectos de yoga, arte, teatro y danza que reúnen a las personas de nuevo y los ayudan a reconciliar sus diferencias. Este tipo de métodos se utilizan cada vez más en conflictos importantes de todo el mundo, lo cual lo convierte en un área de investigación nueva e innovadora con potencial para |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>influir en las investigaciones y las políticas relacionadas con la paz.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tiempo estimado de la participación</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posibles riesgos e incomodidades</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beneficios</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compensación</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidencialidad</strong></td>
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</table>
garantizar la confidencialidad. No se le identificará, a menos que indique específicamente durante el proceso de entrevista que le gustaría que lo citáramos directamente. Si se publican los resultados del estudio, no se utilizará su nombre y no se divulgará o publicará información que revele su identidad sin su consentimiento específico para la divulgación. Las grabaciones de esta entrevista y cualquier material escrito que se derive de ella se mantendrán en un gabinete cerrado en todo momento. Mientras tanto, esta información estará siempre con la investigadora, solo ella tendrá acceso a esta y se esforzará por garantizar la confidencialidad del registro de la información relacionada con la investigación. Además, los representantes de la Junta Ética de Investigación No-Médica de la Universidad de Western Ontario pueden requerir acceso a los registros relacionados con el estudio para supervisar la realización de esta investigación. La confidencialidad de los registros relacionados con la investigación también se mantendrá en este evento.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persona de contacto</th>
<th>Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio, por favor contacte a Mayme Lefurgey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No implica renunciar a los derechos legales</td>
<td>Usted no está renunciando a los derechos legales aceptando participar en esta investigación.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resultados</td>
<td>Si desea recibir una copia de los resultados generales de este estudio, coloque su nombre y dirección en una hoja de papel en blanco y entreguesela a la señora Mayme Lefurgey. Ella enviará los resultados una vez que el estudio se haya completado.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consentimiento</td>
<td>Usted debe indicar su acuerdo voluntario en ser parte de esta investigación al participar en una entrevista con Mayme Lefurgey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participación voluntaria</td>
<td>La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Puede negarse a participar, negarse a responder cualquier pregunta o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. Si desea retirarse del estudio, tiene derecho a solicitar que sus datos no se utilicen en el la investigación.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Este proyecto de investigación está financiado y respaldado por:

Información de contacto del participante:

Nombre:
Ocupación:
Detalles de contacto:
Consentimiento para que el nombre sea publicado en los resultados:
Appendix C: Sample interview guides

**Interview Questions: Marta Participants**

*Introduction to the interview:*

1. What is your name?
2. Do you consent to participating in this interview and having it recorded?
3. Do you understand that you can stop this interview process at any time?
4. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

*Initial questions:*

1. What year were you born?
2. What is your gender?
3. What region of Colombia do you come from?
4. What is your occupation?

*Mid interview:*

1. Can you describe what life circumstances have brought you to this program? What kind of displacement did you face, if any?
2. What did you know about yoga before beginning this program?
3. Do you think yoga is a tool that helps you process your past experiences?
4. Do you think yoga is a tool that will help you in the future? How so?
5. Do you think your participation in the yoga program has had benefits for your family?
6. Have you noticed any physical, emotional or social benefits of yoga?
7. Can you describe your impressions of the ongoing conflict in Colombia? What is the current landscape, what do you think needs to happen for lasting peace?
8. What are your impressions of the peace process?
9. What are some of the things that need to happen in order to rebuild trust and social fabrics in communities affected by the conflict?
10. Would you say that there are gender dimensions to the conflict? If so what are they and what are the implications? Can you give some examples?
11. What is the role of youth in the peace process and sustainable peace in the country?
12. What kind of impact do you think yoga can have in Colombia more broadly as the country works to enter a stage of peace for its citizens?
13. Can yoga influence the peace process in Colombia?
14. Do you think yoga can be a tool for building individual peace? Why or why not?
15. Do you think yoga can be a tool for building community peace? Why or why not?

*Closing the interview:*

1. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me in this interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me about this process or about the research process in general?
Interview Questions: Yoga Instructors

Introduction to the interview:

1. What is your name, occupation, job title?
2. Do you consent to participating in this interview?
3. Do you understand that you can stop this interview process at any time?
4. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

Mid interview:

1. What kind of work do you do with Dunna and for how many years? Can you give us an overview of what your role in this project is?
2. What makes you interested to teach yoga in this kind of setting vs. a regular studio?
3. Can you give us an overview of what kind of yoga you teach? What elements are in these classes that are different from a conventional yoga class?
4. In what ways do you think this program is beneficial for participants?
5. Have you noticed any changes in the participants thus far? Or in previous similar projects in which you have worked with Dunna?
6. Were there hesitations or misconceptions from participants initially about yoga or this project?
7. How do you think yoga can have/is having an impact on the ongoing peace process in Colombia? In rebuilding social fabrics more broadly?
8. How does the work happening at Dunna compliment the peace process?
9. Should projects like Dunna’s be included in the formal peace process initiatives? What are the barriers to this?
10. Do you think the yoga model at Dunna could be applied to conflicts and social issues in other parts of the world?
11. From your experience, how does yoga create individual peace? Collective/societal peace?

Closing the interview:

1. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me in this interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me about this process or about the research process in general?
3. Are we able to cite your name in research documents?
Interview Questions: Peace Sector Professionals/NGO’s

Introduction to the interview:

1. What is your name, age, and occupation?
2. What region of Colombia are you from?
3. Do you consent to participating in this interview?
4. Do you understand that you can stop this interview process at any time?
5. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

Mid interview:

1. Can you describe your impressions of the ongoing conflict in Colombia? What is the current landscape, what do you think needs to happen for lasting peace?
2. What are your impressions of the peace process?
3. What do you perceive the barriers of the initial ‘no vote’?
4. What do you think are the barriers to the peace process now that it is signed? Do you feel optimistic for peace in this reality?
5. Would you say that there are gender dimensions to the conflict? If so what are they and what are the implications? Can you give some examples?
6. What is the role of youth in the peace process and sustainable peace in the country?
7. What types of programs and initiatives are currently happening in the formal peace process as a means to bring lasting peace?
8. What other types of initiatives and programs would you like to see?
9. What are some of the big picture or macro-level things that need to happen in Colombia’s peace process? E.g. rebuilding infrastructure.
10. What are some of the things that need to happen in order to rebuild trust and social fabrics?
11. What are some of the steps you think are needed on an individual level for healing, reintegration etc.?
12. What do you think the value is in alternative forms of peacebuilding such as theatre, dance etc. as means of healing from trauma, conflict resolution and peacebuilding?
13. What kind of impact do you think such program can have in Colombia more broadly as the country works to enter a stage of peace for its citizens?
14. Do you know of any organizations in Colombia who’s work in the peace process has been particularly impactful?
15. More specifically, do you think something like yoga can be impactful for building peace? Why or why not?
16. Can a ‘soft method’ of peacebuilding like yoga have a place in the peace process?
17. Do you think yoga can be a tool for building individual peace? Why or why not?
18. Do you think yoga can be a tool for building community peace? Why or why not?

Closing the interview:

1. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me in this interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me about this process or about the research process in general?
3. Are we able to contact you again for a second interview to ask questions at the end of your training?

**Sample Interview Questions: Dunna Staff**

*Introduction to the interview:*

1. What is your name, occupation, job title?
2. Do you consent to participating in this interview?
3. Do you understand that you can stop this interview process at any time?
4. Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

*Mid interview:*

1. When was Dunna founded? Why did you create Dunna?
2. Can you give me an overview of Dunna’s work? What projects are currently underway?
3. Why did you decide to focus on body-focused initiatives like dance and yoga? Was there any particular inspiration or experience that led to this? (ex- personal experiences with the practices or knowing these methods have worked elsewhere in the world.)
4. In what ways have the various yoga projects Dunna leads been impactful? What type of results are you witnessing?
6. Have you noticed any differences based on the specific population? Or by gender?
7. In what ways is yoga gendered in this context? Are women more receptive?
8. How does yoga help with violent/aggressive expressions of masculinities?
9. What has been the response of donors? Of the population at large? Have you received positive and/or negative feedback? Can you explain?
10. Have you encountered any misconceptions about yoga in your work? (e.g. religion) What has been the impact of this?
11. How do you think yoga can have/is having an impact on the ongoing peace process in Colombia?
12. How does the work happening at Dunna compliment the peace process?
13. Should projects like Dunna’s be included in the formal peace process initiatives? What are the barriers to this?
14. Yoga is a global phenomena, with roots in India and has been popularized in the ‘global north’. Given this complex reality, how is yoga adapted to fit the local context in your programs?
15. What are the challenges in advocating for the benefits of yoga in the context of the religious landscape in Colombia and globally?
16. Yoga is an individualized practice in many ways, but how does it also build community and rebuild social fabrics?
17. Is there a particular type of yoga that Dunna identifies with most? Can you explain how it is different from other branches and why this one is most effective?
18. Does Dunna follow a trauma sensitive approach to yoga? What are the considerations that need to be made?
19. Do you think the yoga model at Dunna could be applied to conflicts and social issues in other parts of the world?
20. What other ‘soft’ models do you think are impactful? How is dunna advocating that the development of soft skills is as integral as more tangible outcomes like building infrastructure?
21. From your experience, how does yoga create individual peace? Collective/societal peace?

Closing the interview:
1. Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me in this interview?
2. Do you have any questions for me about this process or about the research process in general?
3. Are we able to cite your name in research documents?

Interview Questions: Citizens-at-large

Intake questions:

- What is your name?
- What is your job title/occupation?
- Where do you live?
- Gender?
- Age?
- Are we able to cite your name in research documents?

Questions:

- What are your impressions of the ongoing peace process?
- What do you think needs to happen for lasting peace? Are you doing anything to help work towards this?
- What do you think the value is in alternative forms of peacebuilding such as theatre, music and dance to help heal from trauma and build peace? What about yoga?
- What next steps do you think should be taken towards peace in Colombia?
- How has the situation in Colombia affected your family or friends? (ex- do you know people directly affected? do family members have different views from you?)
- Is there anything else you would like to add to what you have told me in this interview?
# Appendix D: Preliminary workplan for research fellowship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>María Adelaida López, Executive Director of Dunna</td>
<td>Week of Nov 7-10</td>
<td>Possibly required: Natalia</td>
<td>Dunna’s office</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Initial interview to find out the overall vision of Dunna and to receive an overview of their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernando Cortés, Executive Director or Sandra Yance, Fundación Bolívar Davivienda</td>
<td>Week of Nov 20</td>
<td>English Interview</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia Quiñones, Co-Founder and Research Chair of Dunna</td>
<td>Anytime/more than 1</td>
<td>English Interview</td>
<td>Dunna’s office</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>To learn more about Dunna’s research activities and vision for peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programa Ahimsa Yoga Para la Reparación: Interview with participants from ARC in Bogotá</td>
<td>As soon as possible (ASAP)</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Possibly Required</td>
<td>Learn more about yoga as a tool for reconciliation and social reparation through hearing the personal narratives of participants and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programa Ahimsa Yoga Para la Reparación:</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá; Skype</td>
<td>Possibly required</td>
<td>Gain the perspective of coordinators of the project. What did they see and experience? Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Translation Required</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Additional Notes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews with yoga teachers involved in the project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>do they think yoga is beneficial in this setting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga Para la Reparación: Possible trip to Medellín for more interviews</td>
<td>Nov 30-1st</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Medellín</td>
<td>Flight from Bogotá to Medellín; hotel nights required Speak to direct beneficiaries and organizers on the ground of the Ahimsa project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga Para la Reparación: Interviews with Government official(s) previously involved in this project</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>Translation possibly required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber Learn more about how this project worked, who is benefited etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance/movement project: Gabriela Martínez, Academic Advisor to Dunna</td>
<td>Week of Nov 7 or 13th</td>
<td>Translation required?</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber Learn about the current and previous dance and movement-based projects at Dunna and learn more about the role of the body in social reparation and peacebuilding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance/movement project: SRPA prison population interview with a dance participant</td>
<td>Week of 13th</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Transportation required Receive the first-hand experience of a participant in Dunna’s dance program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance/movement project: interview with community participants (2)</td>
<td>Week of 13th</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Transportation required Receive the first-hand experience of a participant in Dunna’s dance program for community reconciliation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Housing Project interviews: Tunja</td>
<td>Nov 14th</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Outside Bogotá</td>
<td>Transportation required</td>
<td>Do more intake interviews then schedule follow up interviews with participants. Speak to the coordinator and ask what participants might be of most interest to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRPA Prison Project: Interview with past participant (Sara)</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Transportation possibly required</td>
<td>Gain the perspective from a previous participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRPA Prison Project: interviews with participants/staff</td>
<td>Dec 8th</td>
<td>Translation required</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Transportation required</td>
<td>Get a report on what has been done so far. Who can we interview and where? What is the soonest time Alejandra and I can go to do interviews?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPRA Prison Project: interview weekend in Tunja with participants in the training to be yoga teachers program and staff</td>
<td>Nov 16th or 17th</td>
<td>Translation: Natalia?</td>
<td>Tunja</td>
<td>Transportation Required</td>
<td>Find out about the schedule to see when is the earliest weekend we can go there to interview. We will stay at the Villa de Leyva Auromira Ashram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respira NGO, interview with Paula Ramírez</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber</td>
<td>Learn about what other NGOs are doing in a similar field in the pursuit of peace. Respira focuses on breath work and mindfulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Time/Details</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Art of Living organization, interview with Angela Losada</td>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber</td>
<td>Learn about what other NGOs are doing in a similar field in the pursuit of peace. They host the RAS program a 3 day yoga, meditation intervention for peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canadian Embassy in Bogotá</td>
<td>Week of Nov 13th</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Uber</td>
<td>Learn more about Canadian/Colombian relations and their efforts in the peace process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Marta trip</td>
<td>Nov 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; early morning meeting; go from the 23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; to 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Santa Marta</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td>Learn more about victims project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Theme</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia Quiñones, Co-Founder and Research Chair of Dunna</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Dunna’s office</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>To learn keep an overview of tasks and check in on progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandra Orjuela Garcia, Research Volunteer at Dunna</td>
<td>Friday, Novemb er 10, 2:00pm</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Usaquén Crepes and Waffles</td>
<td>Public transportation</td>
<td>We will discuss the overview of the project and schedule interview times. Also get a report on the community housing yoga project on what has been done so far and contact them to schedule further dates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aydee Velásquez Devia, Administrative Director of Dunna</td>
<td>Week of Nov 7-10</td>
<td>Natalia</td>
<td>Dunna’s office</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Initial meeting to learn more about Dunna and finalize a timeline and the logistics for interviews. Receive schedule of the prison and community projects and schedule drives for Alejandra and me to the interview sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Confirmation of research fellowship letter

October 4, 2017

Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement

CGS-SSHRC Selection Committee,

This letter is to confirm that Mayme Lefurgey, a Ph.D. Candidate at Western University in Canada, will be travelling to Bogotá, Colombia to engage in research for her doctoral dissertation with our organization, Corporación Dunna. Her initial planned dates were August 15 to December 15, 2017, however due to delays in government approval of the project in which she is working, the new dates for her stay in Bogotá are November 1, 2017 to January 28, 2018.

Dunna is a non-profit research organization that contributes to the achievement of an integral and sustainable peace in Colombia, by designing, applying and evaluating yoga, dance and other movement-based practices for both individual and social recovery.

In my role as the Research Director and Co-Founder of Dunna, I will be supervising Mayme’s research while in Bogotá. I regularly supervise large-scale national research projects as well as have previously supervised graduate students who have partnered with Dunna for their research. Dunna can support Mayme during her stay in Colombia with office space, guidance from our staff and regular supervision on her overall project. Further, we will be supervising the data collection of her doctoral research while in-country and providing support for her planned research activities such as translation and will accompany her to interviews.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at:

Natalia Quiñones
Co-Founder and Research Director
Corporación Dunna
Alternativas creativas para la paz
tel: +571.618.2883
Bogotá, Colombia
Appendix D: Final report for research fellowship

Mayme Lefurgey, Ph.D. Candidate
Women’s Studies and Feminist Research, Western University

Final Report: Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement, Vanier CGS

Timeline: I completed a research period abroad with the research organization, Corporación Dunna in Bogotá, Colombia from November 1, 2017 to January 29, 2018. During this three-month period, I was located at the head office in Bogotá and travelled around the country to visit Dunna’s various projects and to complete interviews for my doctoral research. Upon returning to Canada, I will be analyzing the data collected and compiling it as a case study within my broader research project which is due to be completed within 2018.

Activities Report: During my time in Colombia I completed several interviews. Within Dunna, I interviewed the Executive Director, Research Director and several of the organization’s employees who work on projects involving yoga, dance and creative writing as methods for peacebuilding. I interviewed staff from around the country that work in Cali, Medellín, Bogotá, Santa Marta and Tunja for Dunna as well as one of their main funding partners, Fundación Bolivar. This offered me a broad perspective of what the organization does in various communities across the country. I interviewed participants in several of the projects Dunna leads. For example, I interviewed participants in a ‘free housing’ project in Santa Marta and a social housing community in Tunal south of Bogotá. In both of these projects, yoga works to address issues stemming from displacement, complex trauma, poverty and the armed conflict. The projects work at facilitating the values of coexistence and help participants better cope with their emotions and lived realities. Also in Tunal, I participated in observing a focus group that evaluated the project. During this research fellowship, I have also interviewed youth and staff at the juvenile detention centre, Centro Juvenil Amigoniano in Tunja, Boyacá who were participating in a yoga teacher training program led by Dunna. During my time in Colombia, I also interviewed various peace organizations such as Unicef, Redprodepaz, Red Colombiana de Actoría Social Juvenil Popayán, Outown Colombia, The US-based NGO Feet on the Ground, Respira and The Canadian Embassy, in order to understand the context of building peace in Colombia more broadly and from varying perspectives. Furthermore, I interviewed members of society-at-large including a group of graphic designers, a political scientist, a university professor, a psychosocial expert, a creative dance instructor and a university student. Those interviewed were asked to comment on creative methods of peacebuilding and the ongoing peace process.

In addition to formal interviews, I took part in observing yoga classes and trainings led by Dunna staff in order to get a better sense of what they do. In addition to this, I was provided with the training manuals and tools given to the various groups of participants including audio CD’s and step by step instructions for taking what is learned in workshops home to
apply in their own lives. I also attended two yoga classes, one beginner and one intermediate at the Satyananda Yoga academy in Bogotá in order to get a sense of the type of yoga Dunna teaches and the ways in which it is different from mainstream practices of yoga.

Also, during my time in Colombia I participated in the international conference, Build Peace at Los Andes University, watching several presentations and participating in workshops on the theme of peacebuilding in Colombia and around the world. This was a very fruitful experience where I learned more about what NGO’s are doing on the ground to build peace. Furthermore, as an output of my research time in Colombia, Natalia Quiñones (Research Director), María Adelaida López (Executive Director) and myself have submitted a paper to the Race and Yoga Journal for publication. The paper discusses decolonization, inequality and creative peacebuilding through yoga in Colombia.

Reflections: My time working with Dunna has really been impactful on my personal and scholastic development. I have learned a great deal about what it means to build peace and facilitate reconciliation and healing efforts in very difficult circumstances. Having learned more about the ongoing peace process, it is very clear to me that the path to peace is not linear and will have challenges along the way. However, from the conversations I have had around Colombia, I feel very optimistic in people’s passion for and commitment to working for peace, which often means learning to accept and understand ‘the other.’ I have found that the creative methods used by Dunna to be very inspiring, with preliminary data from interviews I conducted demonstrating a very real and meaningful impact on people’s lives. In general, I have found that many people in Colombia are paving new ways for peace and developing creative methods for various populations. This is critical within a global industry that imposes peace from a top-down perspective, often offering initiatives at broad state-level but not at the level of the individual or community—a layer where much reconciliation needs to happen for people to co-exist and live peacefully.

It is also important to note that Dunna’s work is very unique in how it is not a concept imposed from the outside but rather one that is engaging Colombians, by Colombians on a very local and community level. Beyond this, Dunna’s projects work on the ‘individual’ and based on the notion that in order to really achieve peace it must start from within. I believe this factor is often overlooked and remains highly under-researched within the field of peace and conflict studies. The organization leads many different projects, and they are all uniquely adapted to the specific population being served and the challenges that population faces. Dunna also consistently asks for participant feedback and adapt their programs accordingly, empowering people in their own healing processes. Additionally, they have a very sustainable model, seeking to train former participants and local leaders in their methods so that they can be the ones gaining employment in the area and not needing intervention from NGO’s. Dunna provides a lot of support, for example, to participants that they have trained to become yoga teachers and continue to support and mentor them.

During my time with Dunna I have also learned a lot about the specific methods they use and how these creative methods of peacebuilding can have a big impact on individuals, with rippling effects on their families, communities and ultimately, their country. The
scientific research Dunna has conducted, as well as the supportive evidence emerging in like-projects around the world, points to measurable and significant biological and physiological benefits of yoga as a method for peacebuilding. The work Dunna is doing, I believe is really informing the field of peacebuilding and the potential in exploring new methods such as yoga in dealing with complex individual and social traumas. For example, conventional psychosocial care can be limiting, and experiences can be hard to vocalize. Yoga, in such cases, can offer a method of coping but also a method of self-expression through body movement. It also offers participants tangible skills for dealing with anger, aggression, PTSD and its physical and emotional manifestations.

Overall, I have been very inspired by the work happening at Dunna and what it means within the peace process in Colombia and the broader discourse of building peace globally. I hope to continue working with Dunna and learning from them in future collaborations.

Sincerely,
# Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Mayme Lefurgey

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:**

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<th>Institution</th>
<th>Degree Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Western Ontario</td>
<td>Ph.D. Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>2021</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative Graduate Specialization in Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Innsbruck</td>
<td>M.A. Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Innsbruck, Austria</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United Nations Mandated University for Peace</td>
<td>M.A. Gender and Peacebuilding</td>
<td>Cuidad Colon, Costa Rica</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Allison University</td>
<td>B.A. Hons Sociology, Minor in Psychology</td>
<td>Sackville, NB, Canada</td>
<td>2010</td>
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**Honours and Awards:**

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<td>Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship</td>
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<td>Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western University Doctoral Research Excellence Award</td>
<td>2016-2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice President’s Research Award, Research Western</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontario Graduate Scholarship</td>
<td>2013, 2015</td>
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<td>PSAC Local 610 Academic Achievement Scholarship</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>The O’Brien Humanitarian Trust Fellowship</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>The Mary Routledge Fellowship</td>
<td>2015</td>
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YMCA Peace Medallion Recipient
2014

Dean’s List Entrance Award
2013

**Related Work Experience:**

Instructor
Lakehead University
2017

Teaching Assistant
Western University
2013-2015

Graduate Research Fellow
Corporación Dunna
2017-2018

Gender Consultant
2016-2020

Mentor, Teaching Assistant and Curriculum Development
Omprakash Foundation
2013-2020

Appointed Member
New Brunswick Women’s Council
2018-2022

**Publications:**


